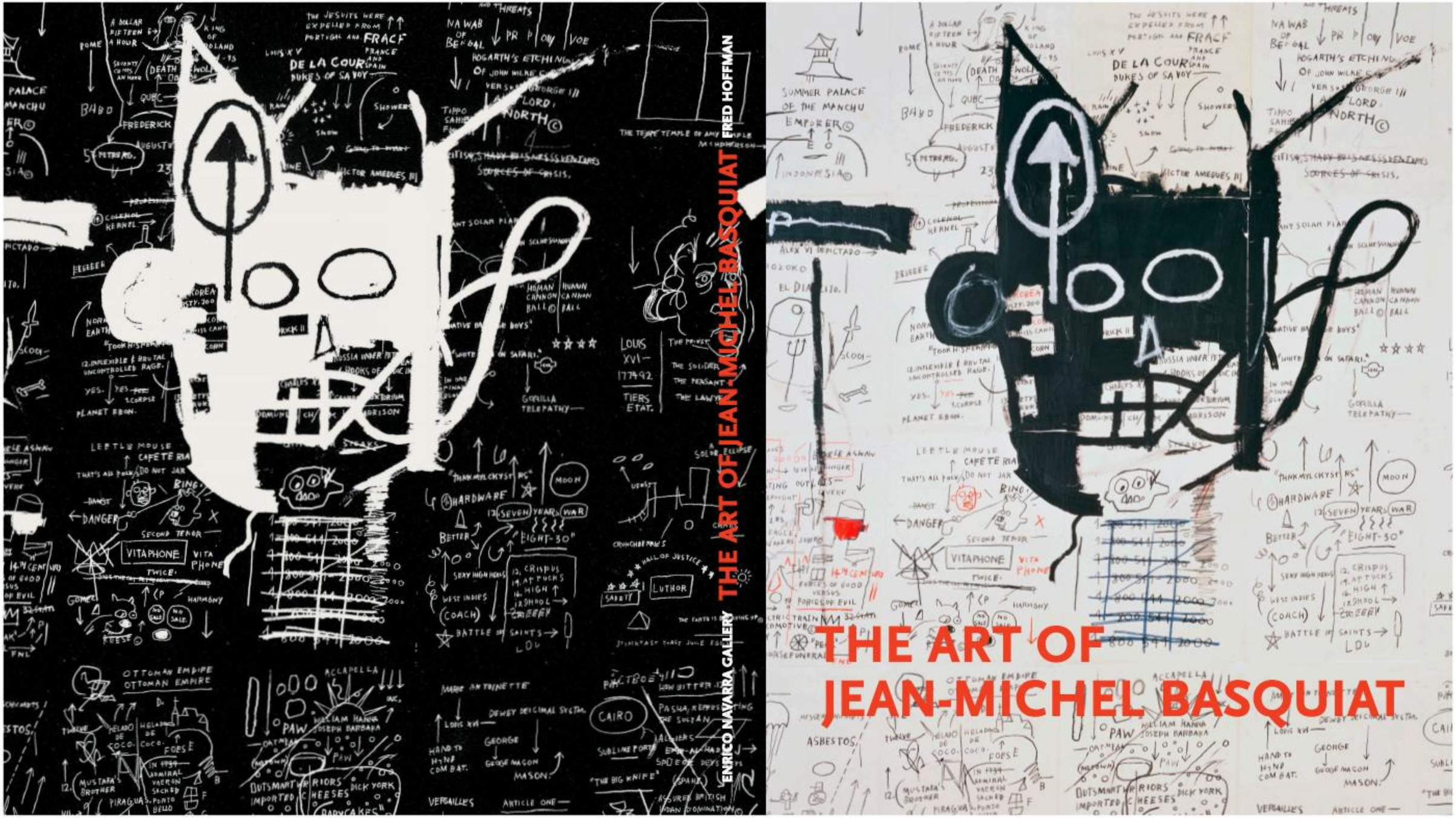
FRED HOFFMAN
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
THE ART OF
ENRICO NAVARRA GALLERY
THE ART OF
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

To Gerard Basquiat, Nora Fitzpatrick, Jeanine Basquiat, and Lisane Basquiat.

THE ART OF JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

Cover, back cover
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (detail), 1983
Oil paintstick, pencil,
crayon, and gouache on paper
mounted on canvas
96 x 126 inches
244 x 320 cm

Untitled (detail), 1983
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
57 5/8 x 75 1/2 inches
146.4 x 192 cm

THE ART OF JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

FRED HOFFMAN

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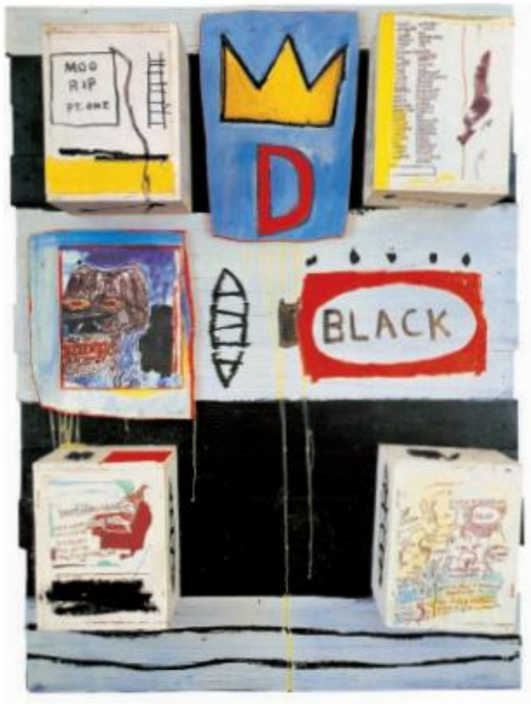
ENRICO NAVARRA GALLERY, NEW YORK



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Black, 1986
Acrylic, oil paintstick, photocopy collage, and wood collage on panel
50 x 36 1/4 x 8 1/2 inches
127 x 92 x 21.5 cm

Jazz, 1986
Acrylic, oil paintstick, photocopy collage, and wood collage on panel
50 x 36 1/4 x 8 1/2 inches
127 x 92 x 21.5 cm

A LIFE SO TRAGICALLY CUT SHORT, AN EVENT SO HORRIBLY A SIGN OF THE TIMES, ENDED A DECADE OF INTENSE creativity. Even though thirty years have elapsed since his death, the desire to celebrate this life lives on. Over the last thirty years, a number of his galleries have continued to show Jean-Michel Basquiat's work, and new ones have joined them.

Those of us who have had the chance to be involved in this adventure since 1989 very quickly understood that these different players and participants are not merely gallery owners, collectors, enlightened amateurs and art critics, curators or heads of institutions, but they are much more than that: true devotees, and their relationship with Jean-Michel Basquiat as well as their understanding of his work constantly evolves.

I barely crossed paths with Jean-Michel, but I became very close to his original dealers. They knew everything, I practically nothing. And we talked...

I also met a large number of his collectors; those who were starting out, and those who were to become serious aficionados but who often did not yet know it at the time. And we talked...

In actual fact, when they wanted to know something I could only rephrase what they were telling me. With globalization, cultural divides have considerably lessened, to the regret of some but the delight of others; and for better or worse, this now dictates the way information spreads.

This collaboration has been in the pipeline for a very long time; we wanted to include one of Fred Hoffman's essays in one of our previous publications. It was well worth the wait since we are now fortunate enough to publish this monograph.

I would like to thank him for the work he has accomplished. I am sure that in five or six years he could write a second volume, as more memories return, and if they do not return, it could also well be the case that by reviewing the works new angles will be revealed, as so much material will be sure to inspire new chapters.

Gerard Basquiat, who kept resolutely out of the art market often said to me "Enrico, people in the art world don't understand that Jean-Michel is the best artist of his generation".

At the time, we thought that he was one of the twenty best artists of the second half of the twentieth century; we dreamt that he would enter the top ten. Gerard allowed us to put on all those exhibitions and to edit all those catalogs and books; he opened our eyes. In the first edition of our monograph, I made the observation that "the error, if there is one, will be collective." In the course of the exhibitions the public has become more numerous at every venue, so this observation could now extend to visitors from all over the world (Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Cuba, France, Japan, Korea, Puerto Rico...). But what really struck me and the team of the gallery was the children's reaction: universal, long-lasting.

The most important thing is from now on to bring together the stories and the memories of those who met Jean-Michel Basquiat ... probably ten to fifteen volumes... ■

Enrico Navarra

JEAN MICHEL BASQUIAT BORN DEC. 22/1960/BROOKLYN/N.Y.)

MOTHER: PUERTO RICAN (FIRST GENERATION)
FATHER: ~~HA~~ PORT-AU PRINCE, HAITI.
(DIVORCED)
[NAME OF THE TOWN]

ST. ANNS
?
P.S. 6
P.S. 101
P.S. 45 ← (SOME CATHOLIC SCHOOL DURING YEAR + ½ IN PUERTO RICO)
I.S. 293
CITY AS SCHOOL

11 TH GRADE DROPOUT
(1) PUT A BOX OF SHAVING CREAM IN PRINCIPAL'S FACE AT GRADUATION

FIRST AMBITION: FIREMAN
FIRST ARTISTIC AMBITION: CARTOONIST. NO POINT ~~IN GOOF~~ IN GOING BACK

EARLY THEMES WERE ~~THE~~:
(1) THE SEAVIEW FROM "VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA"
2. ALFRED.E. NEUMAN
3. ALFRED HICTHCOCK (HIS FACE OVER + OVER)
4. NIXON
5. CARS (MOSTLY DRAGSTER)S.
6. WARS
7. WEAPONS.

(8) MADE DRAWINGS OF COPICK + FRITZ + HAIR + YABOO WITH MARC PROZZO.

(A.) SENT A DRAWING OF A GUN TO J. EDGAR HOOVER IN ~~3rd~~ THIRD GRADE. (NO REPLY)

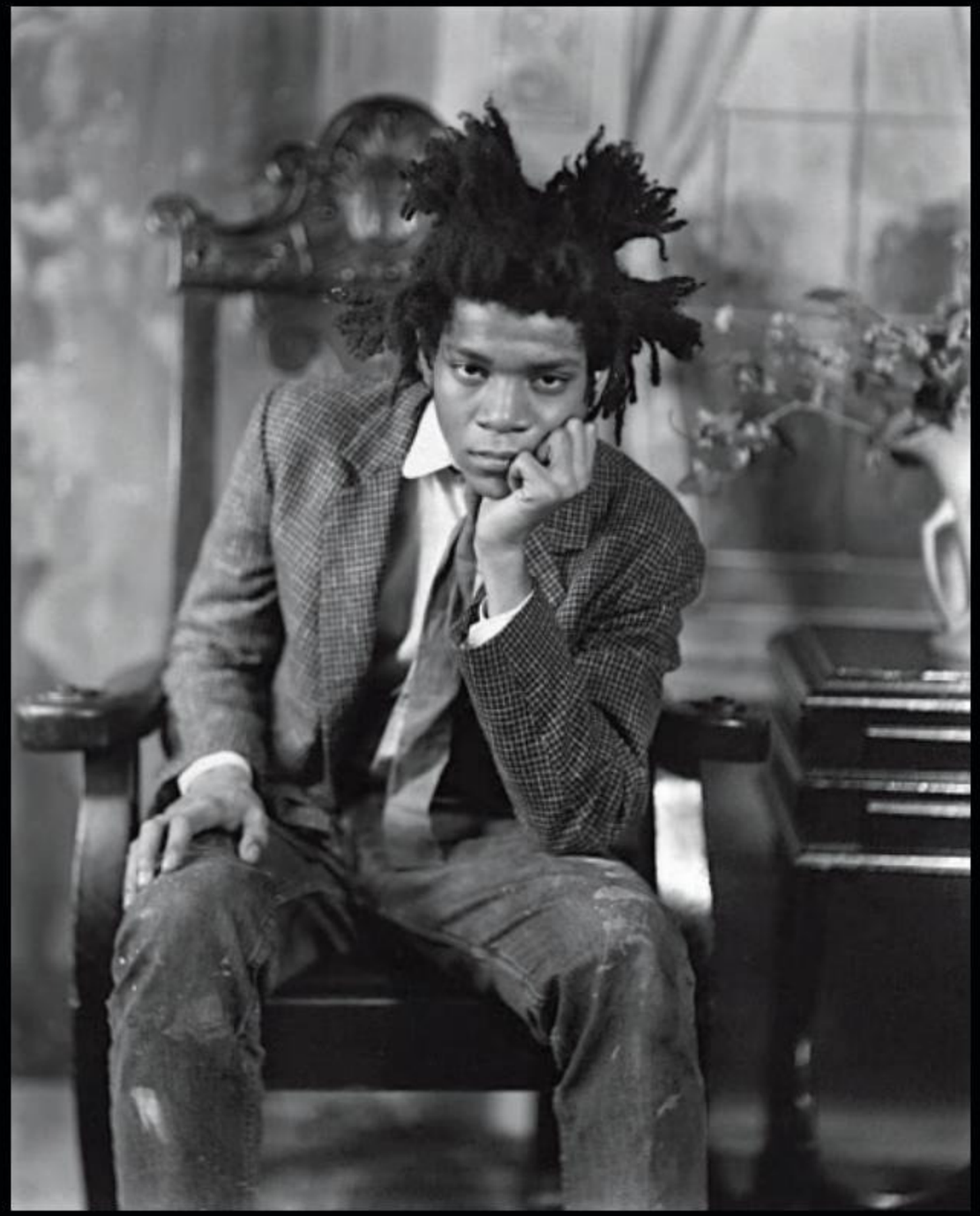
TAUGHT SECOND GRADERS WHEN I WAS IN THE FOURTH GRADE. (CARS MADE OF PAPERCLIPS MASKING TAPE + FASTENERS.

SCHOOLING: SOME ACADEMIC LIFE DRAWING IN NINTH GRADE. (WAS THE ONLY CHILD THAT FAILED)

EARLY MUSIC INFLUENCES: WEST SIDE STORY
THE "WATUSI"
ROUND 'BOUT MIDNIGHT
WALKING HAPPY
BLACK ORPHEUS.

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
This image is adapted from the artist's 1982 handwritten biography, known only through reproduction

JAMES VAN DER ZEE
Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1982



TIMELINE

1960
Born December 22, 1960 at Brooklyn Hospital, New York. His father, Gerard Basquiat, born in Port-au-Prince Haiti; his mother, Matilde Andradas, born in Brooklyn of Puerto Rican parents. The Basquiats live in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

1963-64
According to Jean-Michel's father, Gerard, he begins drawing and painting.

1965
With his mother, Matilde, he often visits the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

1968
While playing ball in the street, Basquiat is hit by an automobile. He breaks an arm, suffers various internal injuries and has to have his spleen removed. He is hospitalized for a month, during which time he receives a copy of *Gray's Anatomy* from his mother.

1971
Gerard Basquiat and his three children move; Jean-Michel attends the first of many public schools.

1975
Jean-Michel runs away from home for the first time for a few hours.

1978
Jean-Michel leaves home for good. He quickly becomes acquainted with future figures of both downtown hip hop and graffiti scenes. Basquiat begins to sell hand-painted postcards and T-shirts; approaches Andy Warhol and Henry Geldzahler inside the Soho restaurant WPA; he sells a postcard to Warhol while Geldzahler dismisses him as "too young."

1979
Along with Michael Holman, Shannon Dawon and Vincent Gallo form the band Gray. Basquiat becomes a regular at key downtown clubs, The Mudd Club, CBGB's, Club 57. Basquiat befriends Glenn O'Brien and is frequent guest on O'Brien's TV Party.

1980
Jean-Michel Basquiat's art is exhibited for the first time in "Times Square Show," and receives immediate acclaim. Basquiat is selected by Glenn O'Brien to play lead role in the film "New York Beat," written by O'Brien, produced by Maripol and directed by Edo Bertoglio. The film was released as "Downtown '81" in 2000.

1981
Basquiat is included in "New York/New Wave." Later this year he travels to Italy for his first one-artist exhibition at Galleria d'Arte Emilio Mazzoli in Modena Italy. The work is shown under the name SAMO. Basquiat is asked to participate in "Public Address," a group exhibition at Annina Nosei Gallery in Soho. Following this exhibition, Nosei becomes the artist's primary dealer. Knowing that Jean-Michel does not have his own studio, Nosei invites him to use the basement of her gallery as his first studio. The first extensive article on Jean-Michel Basquiat,"The Radiant Child," written by Rene Ricard appears in the December 1981 issue of *Artforum magazine*.

1982
Jean-Michel Basquiat moves to 151 Crosby Street in SoHo. In March Basquiat has his first one-artist exhibition in the United States at the Annina Nosei Gallery in New York. In April he travels to Los Angeles and opens his first show in Los Angeles at the Larry Gagosian Gallery in West Hollywood. In June, Basquiat exhibits at Documental 7 in Kassel, West Germany. In the fall he presents his first exhibition with Bruno Bischofberger in Zurich. Basquiat shows at Fun Gallery, New York. Late fall Basquiat returns to Los Angeles where he will work and reside over the next 18 months.

1983
Jean-Michel Basquiat is included in the 1983 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Art, New York. In Venice, Basquiat works with Fred Hoffman's New City Editions and produces six limited edition silkscreen prints. In New York, the artist moves to 57 Great Jones Street.

1984
Basquiat is included in "An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture" at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, which inaugurates the reopening of the museum. In conjunction with his inclusion in the exhibition Untitled (1983, silkscreen on canvas) becomes the first work by the artist to be acquired by an American museum. In August, Basquiat's first museum exhibition opens at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Exhibits at Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

1985
Jean-Michel Basquiat is featured on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* in conjunction with the article "New Art, New Money: The Marketing of an American Artist." Basquiat executes two large mural-scale paintings for The Palladium Nightclub in New York City. Sixteen collaborative paintings by Basquiat and Warhol are exhibited at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.

1986
Basquiat travels to Africa for the first time. A large exhibition of more than 60 paintings and works on paper opens at the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover, Germany.

1987
Basquiat exhibits at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.

1988
Basquiat exhibits at the Vrej Baghoomian Gallery, New York, the final one-artist exhibition of his work during his lifetime. On Friday August 12, Jean-Michel Basquiat dies in his Great Jones Street loft.

1990
The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat arranges with the Robert Miller Gallery, New York an exhibition "Jean-Michel Basquiat A Survey of Drawings."

1992
The Whitney Museum of Art presents "Jean-Michel Basquiat," the artist's first retrospective.

1960

1970

1973
- Robert and Ethel Scull' sale at Sotheby's.

1974
- The Watergate Scandal.

1975
- The Fall of Saigon.

1976
- The American Bicentennial.

1977
- First home computer, Commodore PET.
- New York City blackout lasts 25 hours.
- Elvis Presley dies at Graceland at 42.

1977–81
- Studio 54, world's most famous nightclub.

1979
- Grandmaster Flash and Run DMC emerge and become influential expressions of hip hop culture.
- First graffiti artist exhibition: graffiti artists Lee Quinones and Fab Five Freddy exhibit in Rome.

1980
- Colab (Collaborative Projects Incorporated) and Fashion Moda (organizers) present "Times Square Show," 41st St and 7th Ave Armory, New York City.

1980

1981
- MTV 1st 24 hour cable dedicated to music and video.
- P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, New York presents "New York/New Wave".

1982
- Documenta 7, Kassel Germany.
- "A New Spirit in Painting," Royal Academy of Art, London.

1983
- "Champions," Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.
- "Style Wars," (film) released, capturing role of graffiti in hip hop culture.
- "1983 Whitney Biennial Exhibition," Whitney Museum of Art, New York.

1984
- Drug problem intensifies as crack cocaine is first introduced in US.
- AIDS crisis intensifies.

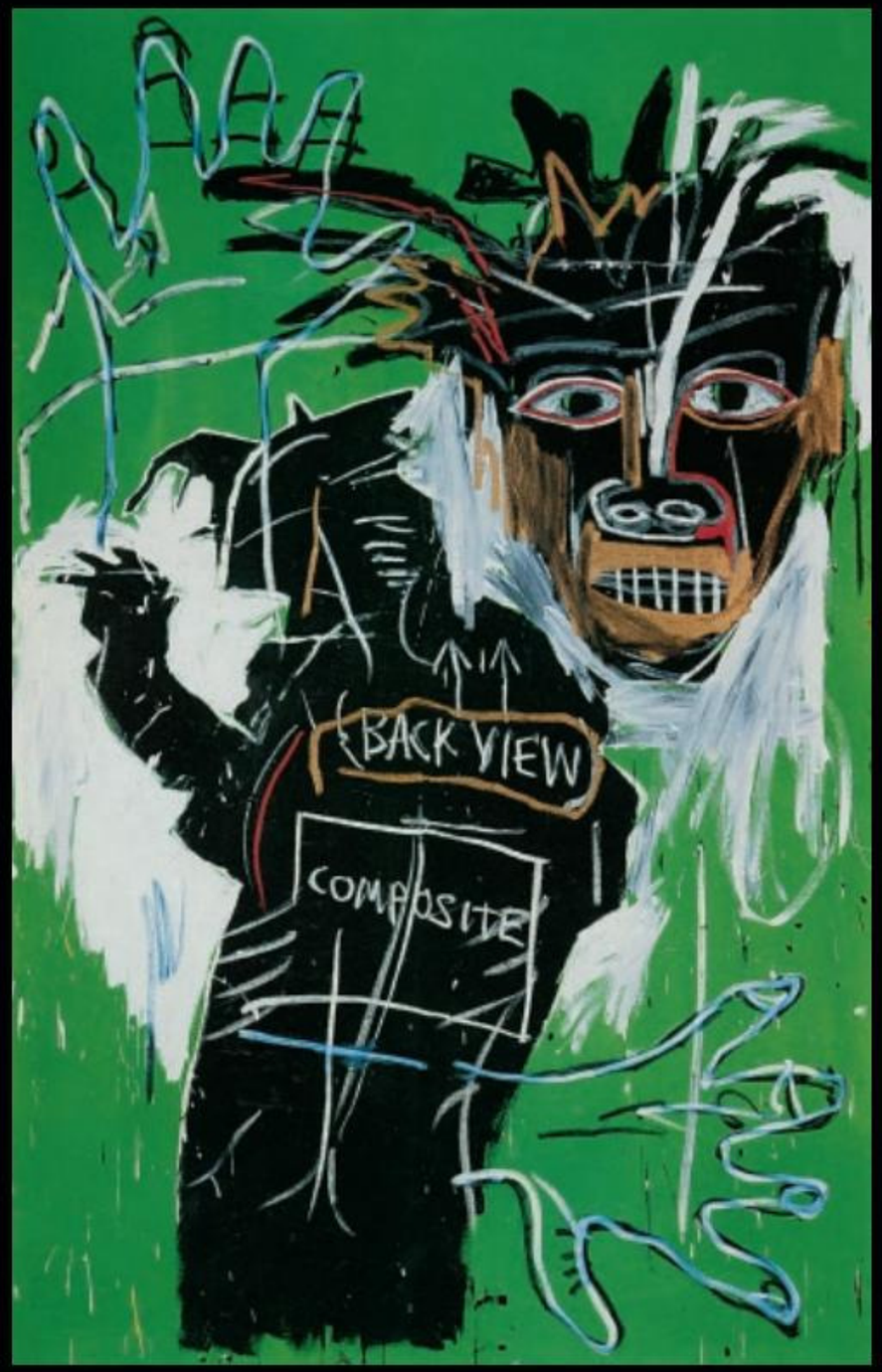
1987
- Andy Warhol dies.

1989
- Cold War is over.
- Fall of the Berlin Wall.

1990

EDO BERTOGLIO
Jean-Michel Basquiat on the set of *Downtown 81*, 1980–81

EDO BERTOGLIO
Jean-Michel Basquiat on the set of *Downtown 81*, 1980–81



From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Self Portrait as a Heel, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
50 x 40 inches
127 x 101.5 cm

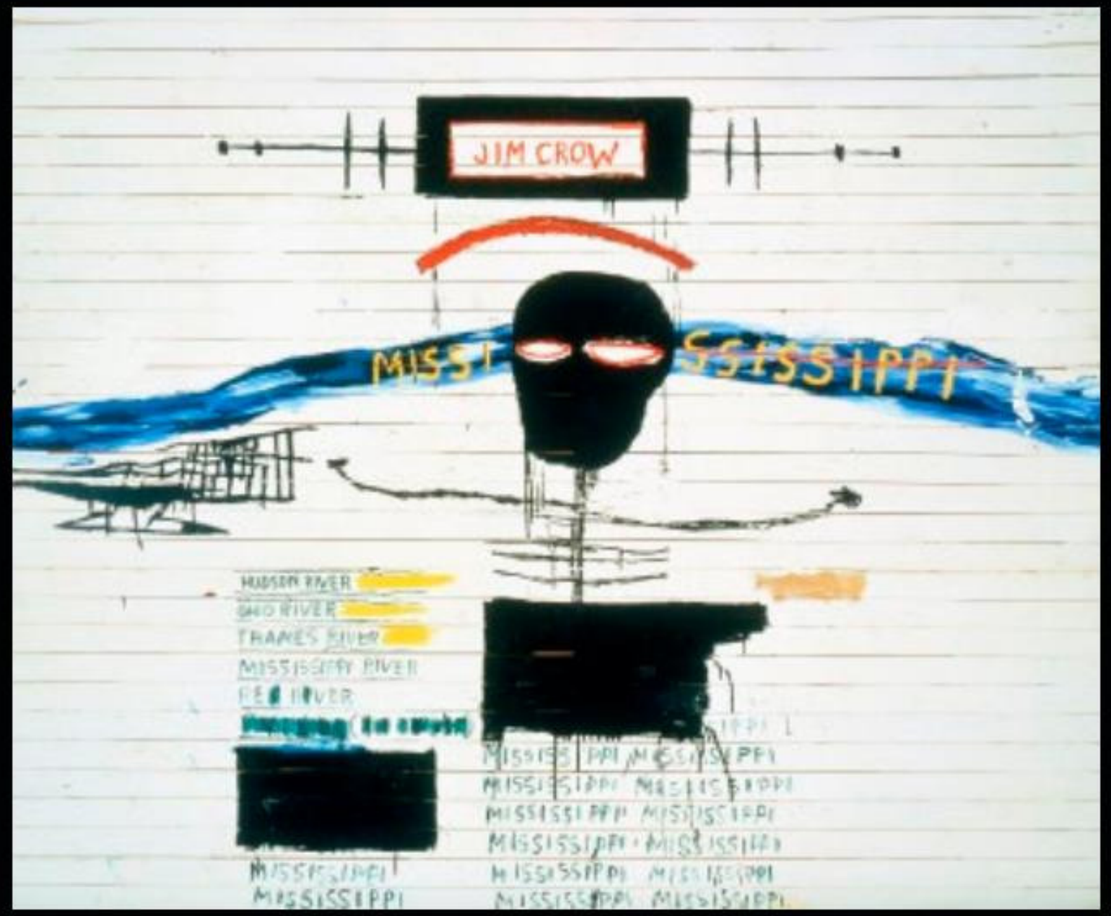
Self Portrait as a Heel, Part Two, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
96 x 61 1/2 inches
244 x 156 cm

From left to right
ROLAND HAGENBERG
Jean-Michel Basquiat Standing over Painting, 1983

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Self Portrait, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on paper mounted on canvas
with tied wood supports
60 x 60 inches
152.5 x 152.5 cm

PP. 20–21
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Two Heads on Gold), 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
80 x 125 inches
203 x 317.5 cm

JMB



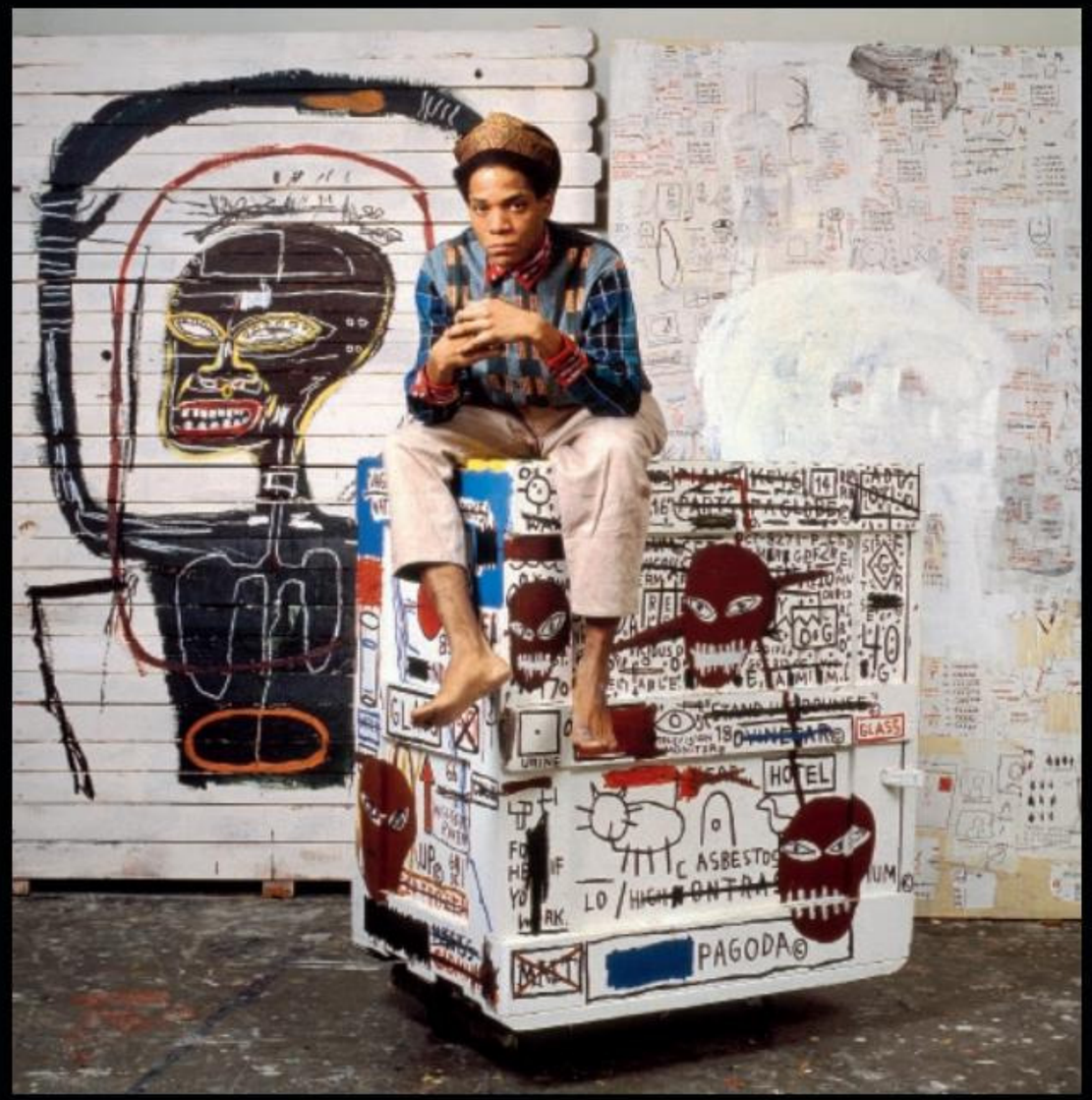
From left to right:
BRIAN D. WILLIAMS
Jean-Michel Basquiat Painting Gold Griot, Venice, CA, 1984

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Jim Crow, 1986
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
81 x 96 inches
206 x 244 cm

GLENN O'BRIEN
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Madonna, 1981–82

TAMRA DAVIS
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Venice, CA, 1983; *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, 2010 (screen grab)

Installation "Basquiat"
The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Los Angeles, July–October, 2005



LIZZIE HIMMEL
Jean-Michel Basquiat,
Great Jones Street Studio,
New York, 1985

From left to right:
JEAN KALLINA
Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1983

ROLAND HAGENBERG
Jean-Michel Basquiat's Studio on Crosby Street with Bar Stool, 1983

GIANFRANCO GORGONI
Jean-Michel Basquiat,
Crosby Street Studio, New York,
with *Made in Japan I*, 1982

THE ART OF JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

FRED HOFFMAN

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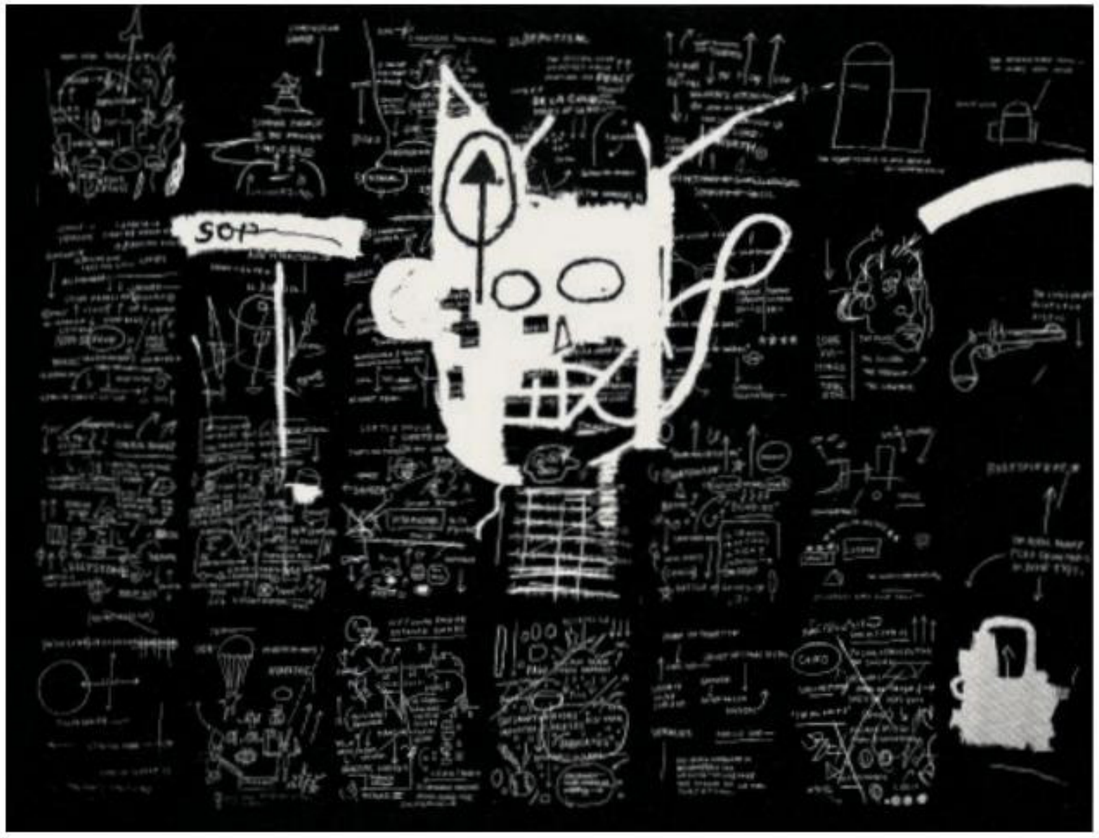
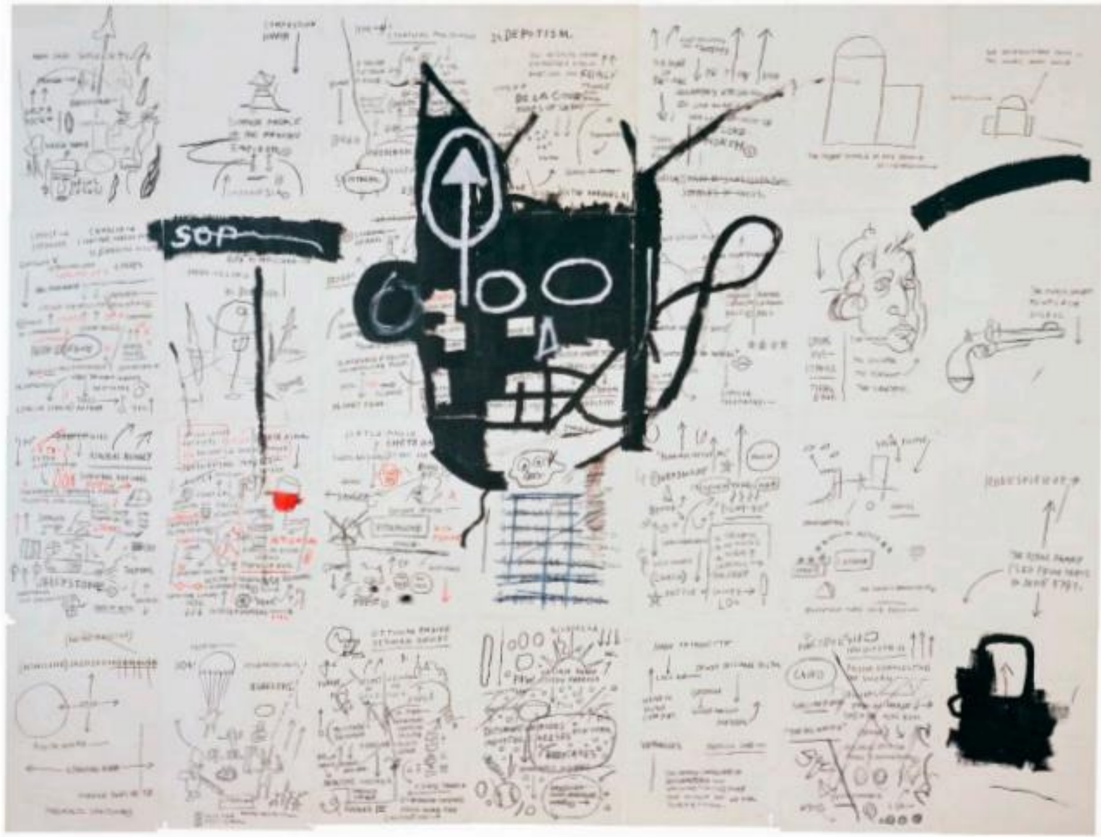


JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
57 5/8 x 75 1/2 inches
146.4 x 192 cm

WHEN I FIRST MET JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT, HE WAS LIVING and working in the ground floor gallery-living space of Larry Gagosian's recently completed ultra modern, multi-story home on Market Street in Venice, California. Early in his residency, Basquiat was joined for a week or so by Madonna. They had been seeing each other in New York City, and she came to Venice to hang out with Jean-Michel. They were looking for fun, and it was decided that they should go for lunch at the commissary on the lot of the Twentieth Century Fox studio. Through someone in Hollywood (which might have been Doug Cramer, Barry Lowen, or Scott Spiegel, all of whom had taken a very early interest in Basquiat's work), a reservation was booked and the three of us drove over to the movie studio on the edge of Beverly Hills. The commissary was a large, open, high-ceilinged room with an expanse of tables. We were shown to a table from which Basquiat and Madonna surveyed the diners, many of them well-recognized celebrities. They kept to themselves, exchanging intimate words and expressions. What they did share with me I have never forgotten. They assured me that someday they would be famous, and that everyone in this commissary would know who these two aspiring young artists were. Over the years I have often returned to my memories of that afternoon. Of course, they were correct. Today Jean-Michel Basquiat and Madonna are as renowned as any star Hollywood has produced.

One of the gifts of my life was the opportunity to know and work with Jean-Michel Basquiat. During the artist's residency in Venice, California beginning in November 1982 and continuing with infrequent interruptions until May 1984, Jean-Michel and I produced seven silkscreen editions as well as a series of approximately 30 original paintings. During his Venice residency I also arranged with Mark Francis for Basquiat's first museum exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh in June 1984. I also facilitated the first acquisition of an important work of art by Jean-Michel Basquiat by an American museum, when I donated *Untitled* (1983) (57 x 75 inches, silkscreen on canvas) to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. As of this writing, this is still the only large-scale work by Jean-Michel Basquiat in the museum's collection. In 2005 I co-curated the most recent American retrospective, "Basquiat" at the Brooklyn Museum, which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Houston Museum of Fine Arts.

Until I wrote my text for the catalogue accompanying the Brooklyn retrospective, I was simply ignorant of the depth of Basquiat's commitment to social and cultural issues, especially the identity of the black man in a predominantly white society. With my Brooklyn text I also became aware of Basquiat's concern for broader questions concerning



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Oil paintstick, pencil,
crayon, and gouache on paper
mounted on canvas
96 x 126 inches
244 x 320 cm

TAMRA DAVIS
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Fred Hoffman, Venice, CA, 1983;
Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child, 2010
(screen grab)

human identity, self-awareness, death, and the immortality of the soul. While I intuitively knew that the work considered these and many other subjects, I did not realize how central they were to Basquiat's practice as an artist.

After completing my text for the Brooklyn exhibition catalogue, which I believe was the first concerted effort to tackle the iconography of Basquiat's work, I knew that my examination of the subjects of the artist had only just begun. Left with that realization, I resumed my primary career as a dealer in contemporary art. (As a condition of my curatorial employment for the Brooklyn retrospective, I agreed to forgo any involvement with the sale and distribution of Basquiat works for three years.) About four years ago I committed to expand my thoughts, notes and reflections into a comprehensive study: *The Art of Jean-Michel Basquiat*. As I undertook this project, I also recognized that sharing some of my first-hand experiences with Jean-Michel Basquiat might be meaningful.

Thirty years ago, Basquiat was neither a brand nor a star, and his "support system" was limited to a few individuals who recognized both his talent and his vision. Three dealers played key roles in Basquiat's career. His first dealer, Annina Nosei, must be singled out for her dedication and early support of the artist. She gave Basquiat his first studio, enabling him to unleash an unprecedented outpouring of both paintings and drawings. The work Basquiat produced while in association with Annina Nosei defined the remainder of his short career. Nosei recognized the importance of this work and introduced Basquiat to collectors, dealers, writers, and museum curators. Two emerging forces in the contemporary art world, Larry Gagosian and Bruno Bischofberger, not only recognized Basquiat's brilliance, but each in his own way accommodated the artist's professional and personal needs. I have previously written about the commitment of Herb and Lenore Schorr to the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. They were the first collectors to put together a major collection of the artist's work, and also provided him with a form of familial support.

Nine other art world personalities merit recognition. The support of Glenn O'Brien, creator of *TV Party* on New York cable TV and music editor at *Interview* magazine, was instrumental in aiding the artist's navigation of the New York art world. O'Brien's writings on Basquiat are some of the most valuable contributions to date, providing key insight into Basquiat's state of mind and vision. Diego Cortez provided a different kind of support. Diego figured out the downtown art world before anyone else; no one had a better sense of the scene. He was the first to recommend Basquiat's work to collectors and dealers. Rene

Ricard's now historic 1981 article for *Artforum* magazine, "The Radiant Child," broke the ice, decisively heralding Basquiat's arrival. Henry Geldzahler was the first museum person to embrace Basquiat's work. While there remained a significant gap between Geldzahler's commitment to the artist and that of his colleagues at other New York cultural institutions, Basquiat saw Henry's support as legitimizing his creative efforts. Patti Astor merits recognition because the Basquiat exhibition at her short-lived Fun Gallery was his most adventurous, and in many ways, most memorable one-person gallery exhibition. Paige Powell not only provided Basquiat with personal support, but through her position at *Interview* magazine facilitated Basquiat's engagement with New York society. Her 1984 group exhibition at her apartment was a key event in the artist's career. Jeffrey Deitch was instrumental as well. In the early 1980s Jeffrey championed a number of emerging downtown talents.

The art world has long identified Andy Warhol as the person who turned Basquiat into a highly recognized artistic personality. While there is some truth to this, it fails to capture the importance of their relationship. By the second half of 1984 Basquiat was an established, albeit somewhat controversial figure on the New York art scene. I have always felt that by the end of 1984 things were happening a little too fast for Jean-Michel to handle. At this moment he started to feel vulnerable and more cautious. It was at this time that Andy Warhol really entered his life and provided a safety net. Both as a friend and collaborator Warhol was able to provide a grounding for the young artist. Warhol's untimely death was one of the turning points in the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Finally, I extend a shout out to Julian Schnabel. His movie *Basquiat* was the critical link between Basquiat the artist and Basquiat the cultural icon. Even though I have never felt comfortable with Julian's portrayal of surfing scenes as the counterpoint to the tumultuous and complex nature of Basquiat's life and world, his movie changed the perception of Basquiat forever.

I would like to make one comment concerning the titling of works by Jean-Michel Basquiat. The only artworks with irrefutable titles are those paintings and works on paper that the artist titled on the back of the work. Our need to give meaning to the artist's outpourings of expression and reflection has caused us to place titles on works that, in fact, were never titled by the artist. In addition, the fact that many works by the artist include words and phrases has led us to believe that it is appropriate to assign a particular word or phrase as the title of a work. This is simply not the case. For years, *The Nile* (1983) was titled *El Gran Espectaculo (The History of Black People)* simply because the phrase EL GRAN ESPECTACULO occurs in the painting. While this phrase might help us to understand the work's subject matter, it was not the artist's intent for it to become the actual title of the painting. I feel that the titling of a good number of paintings, in particular those works titled *Self Portrait*, needs to be reconsidered.

On November 12, 2013, a work on paper came to auction at Christie's with both catalogue and promotional material identifying the work's title as *Untitled (Head of Madman)*. The subtitling of this work of art was not done by the artist, and it reflects speculation and exaggeration. The first page of the stand-alone catalogue published on this work includes a detail of Basquiat's drawing juxtaposed with the inside cover image of a delirious, possibly insane Jack Nicholson from the film *The Shining*. While Diego Cortez's accompanying text argues that the work's subject matter is that of mental derangement, I would suggest that the work expresses Basquiat's fascination with a state of ecstasy. While Basquiat himself stated at one time that "80% of my work is about anger," it is simply too far a reach to view Basquiat's image as the depiction of an individual who has lost the capacity to function rationally. Anger might have been 80% of the engine powering Basquiat's creative expression, but it was clearly not the dominant message and meaning conveyed by the work.

I was trained as an art historian, and took a PhD with a dissertation on the art and life of Mark Tobey. While I have primarily worked as gallerist and art dealer, I have written books as well as catalogues for museums and galleries (including twenty publications for my own galleries between 1989 and 2002). Following my major study/catalogue raisonné on the art of Chris Burden, this is the most comprehensive publication I have ever undertaken.

It has become more and more evident to me that the art of Jean-Michel Basquiat is ripe for serious art historical consideration. I view this study as a beginning rather than a culmination. It is my hope that my comments and observations will facilitate and motivate further investigation of the art of Jean-Michel Basquiat. ■

TAMRA DAVIS
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Venice, CA, 1983; *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, 2010 (screen grab)

LIZZIE HIMMEL
Photograph of Jean-Michel Basquiat for *The New York Times Magazine* (cover), February 10, 1985

INTRODUCTION

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE LIFE OF JEAN-MICHEL Basquiat over the last twenty-five years, but only a handful of texts has demonstrated his art historical contribution. More must be learned about the content of his work and his means of expression. With a deeper understanding of Basquiat's unique, highly personal approach to his themes and subject matter, we can better place this contemporary painter in the history of art.

Basquiat came of age in the early 1980s, a time when the contemporary art world had a new vigor and vitality. At this moment a number of factors came into play: a new generation of artists on both sides of the Atlantic; important museum exhibitions dedicated to the art of the new; the establishment of museums solely dedicated to contemporary art; and a new generation of art collectors who both championed the art of their time, and saw the linkage between these creative voices and the now recognized abstract expressionist and pop masters. Having come on the scene just as these forces were starting to coalesce and assert themselves, Basquiat was initially categorized, along with several other talented newcomers, as a manifestation of a "new spirit in painting."[1]

As the 1980s unfolded, media attention increased. The focus was drawn away from the art itself and toward the persona of this ambitious and extremely worldly young man. Basquiat fit the bill for this new audience. While there was a handful of dealers, collectors and curators who perceptively recognized the unique talents of this exciting young painter, others were much more captivated by his celebrity and newfound stature in New York society. In this regard, it must be added that the artist himself recognized the potential for capitalizing on media attention to establish himself as one of the stars of this new generation.

An objective evaluation of what the artist had thus far produced was overshadowed by Basquiat's quickly developing notoriety. No greater manifestation of "the myth of Jean-Michel Basquiat" was his appearance on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* on February 10, 1985 in an article titled "New Art, New Money: The Marketing of An American Artist." For the magazine cover, the artist positioned himself in his studio with a painting in progress behind him. His left hand is raised to his temple, while his right hand holds a paintbrush. He is gazing out directly at the viewer.

The image offers us several distinct "takes" on our subject. Holding a paintbrush and seated in front of an unfinished painting, he conveys a traditional representation of the artist in his studio. At the same time that Basquiat presents

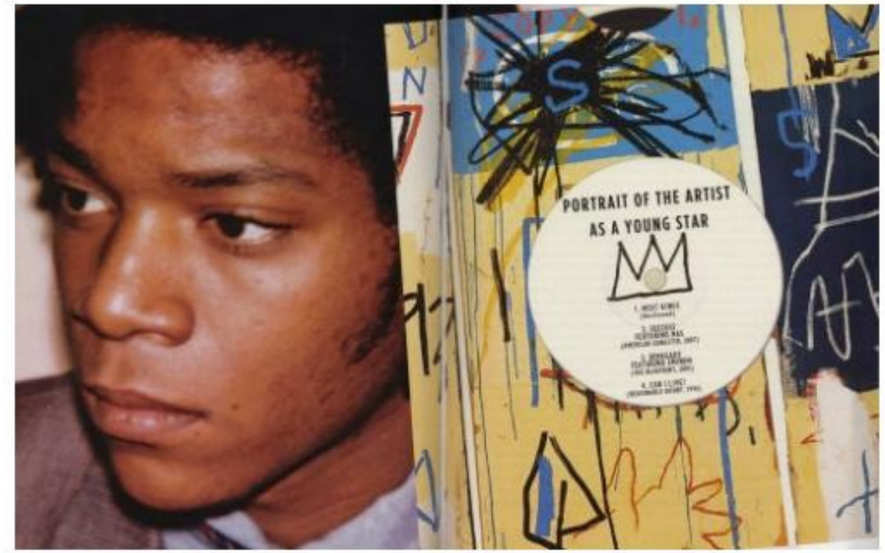
Top
NINA LEEN
The New York School Painters, November 24, 1950; published in *Life Magazine* "The Irascibles", January 15, 1951

Top right
Time Magazine (cover), June 17, 1985

Below
Uniqlo garment tag for SPRZ/NY/MOMA clothes, 2015

himself as actively engaged with his craft, his left hand gestures in contemplation, indicating a turning within. While both the artist's active and passive gestures match our expectations of attributes associated with an artist, in this image Jean-Michel Basquiat directly challenges the viewer by portraying himself shoeless, dressed in an elegant suit. While we are looking at a painter, we should not take our subject for granted. We neither know him, nor what he stands for. With his hand raised to his temple, the artist declares a process of internalization. He says that he is in possession of some truths, some beliefs that are not part of our experience. This *arriviste* demands that we stop and pay attention.

Knowing that backlash was inevitable, Basquiat used the opportunity presented by *The New York Times Magazine* cover image to challenge a number of cultural taboos as well as to express his personal vision. Most importantly, Basquiat was the first black artist in the history of art to grace the front cover of a major American weekly publication. I would contend that it was the artist's primary concern to call attention to himself not just as an artist, but also as a young black man. And what better way of achieving this than by dressing in a suit and appearing shoeless, as if a new kind of primitive (without shoes) had just arrived in the cultural hub of the Western world from some distant and mysterious land? Until the arrival of Jean-Michel Basquiat, you just never expected to see a young black artist achieve this kind of celebrity or societal position.



JAY Z
Decoded, 2010
Reproduction of pages 90–91 with detail of Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Charles the First*, 1982

It is reminiscent of the famous 1951 *Life* magazine cover depicting "The Irascibles," the members of the New York school of abstract expressionism. Much as that earlier cover introduced the new vanguard of American art, Basquiat announced the arrival of a new creative force. For Basquiat, this was not only personal but also cultural, and he saw this cover image as an announcement on behalf of all young black males. Today, in the era of Jay Z and Kanye, such an appearance would be taken for granted. But thirty years ago, this was not only groundbreaking, it was also a direct confrontation to many (white) attitudes and stereotypes. It was this same intent and mission that informed Basquiat's subject matter and artistic strategies. Today we are just beginning to understand how much of this young artist's studio production was concerned with questions of societal honor, identity and recognition. While *The New York Times Magazine* cover was immediately perceived to be media hype, a fashion statement or an affirmation of a new direction in American art, it was in fact much more profound. This cover, the result of the artist's astute understanding of how to use the media, made important breakthroughs that would open doors to young creative individuals of diverse cultural, social, and geographic backgrounds.

Basquiat's life and artistic contribution have influenced the current generation of black cultural figures. Recording mogul and musical artist Jay Z acknowledges Jean-Michel Basquiat, whom he did not know, in his autobiography *Decoded*. He reflects on the choices Basquiat had to make as he attempted to express his unique artistic voice:

> "...People always wanted to stick Basquiat in some camp or another, to paste on some label that would be stable and make it easy to treat him like a commodity. But he was elusive. His eye was always on a bigger picture, not on whatever corner people tried to frame him in. But mostly his eye was probably on himself, on using his art to get what he wanted, to say what he wanted, to communicate his truth. Basquiat shook any easy definition. He wasn't afraid of wanting to succeed, to get rich, to be famous..."[2]

In the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jay Z saw an important precedent for his own striving for success and fame. For the new rap mogul, Basquiat's life became almost heroic, both in the artist's aspirations and subsequent fall. But what makes Jay Z's commentary especially insightful is that he understood how much the young painter strove to integrate his own life experiences with the content of his creative output. In reflecting on Basquiat's masterpiece *Charles the First*, Jay Z states:

> "I read it as a statement about what happens when you achieve a certain position. You become a target. People want to take your head, your crown, your title. They want to emasculate you, make you compromise or sacrifice in a way that no man, or woman should. And you resist it until one day your albums aren't moving and the shows aren't filling up and it seems like the game might have moved on without you. Then you start to change, you do whatever you need to do to get back into that spotlight. And that's when you're walking dead. One way or another, they get you."[3]

For Jay Z, and for others like him in the music business, Basquiat's life and work were an expression of what happens "when you actually get the thing that you'd die for." For black superstars, Basquiat is a beacon, celebrating their historical, cultural and social roots. The prominence of a young black artist on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* was shocking to some, but it heralded the arrival of something America was primed to receive.

The cover photo and article led to a strong response from significant quarters of the art establishment. *Time* magazine art critic Robert Hughes reviewed the 1985 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, which opened a fortnight after *The New York Times Magazine* cover story. Basquiat was included in the 1983 Biennial, but not in the 1985 exhibition. Nevertheless, Hughes'comments could be as much directed at the work and career of Jean-Michel Basquiat as those artists included in the 1985 Biennial. What I find interesting is how today, thirty years later, Basquiat's art seems to fulfill the very criteria Hughes found to be so lacking. As Hughes concludes:

> "It as though the conditions that produce great art—patience, internalization, ruthless self-criticism and an engagement with the authoritative past that goes deeper than the mere ransacking of one's culture for quotable motifs—have been bleached out of current painting by the glare of its own success."[4]

In regard to Hughes' comment, it is my feeling that the text presented in the following eleven chapters of this study are evidence of Jean-Michel Basquiat taking on the challenge posed in Robert Hughes'review. The paintings Basquiat produced both before and at the time of Hughes'remarks show an engagement with the past, a severe critique of the present, and the vision of a fundamental transformation in contemporary society.

Seeing Basquiat as a prime example of "hype and premature careerism," Hughes and many of his colleagues in the New York art community solidified their position with the appearance of *The New York Times Magazine* article. Resistance to Basquiat's art extended to the thoughts and actions of leading museum directors and their trustees, influential curators, artists, and collectors. The New York art establishment was simply not willing to engage or properly evaluate the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. For this part of the art world, the *New York Times* article simply became evidence of the media's desire to promote undeserving artists and artworks for their sensational interest rather than their significance.

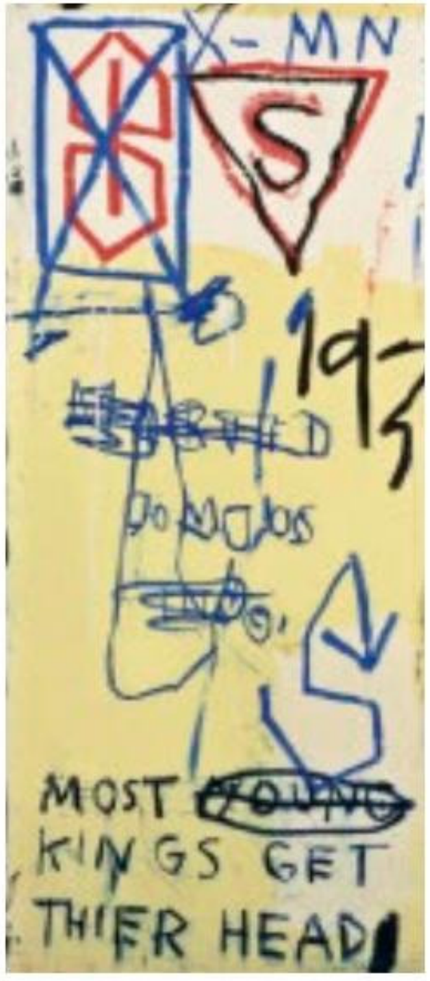
Of course, the rejection of Jean-Michel Basquiat's art only gained traction once the media picked up on the developing association of the artist with Andy Warhol. Andy was genuinely committed not only to Jean-Michel Basquiat, but also to several other emerging painters, including Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, Francesco Clemente, and Julian Schnabel. Critics, museum curators and trustees, however, seized on the association of the pop master with the young Basquiat as evidence that the commercialization of art as manifested in Warhol's work was also the basis of the work of the young painter. In Chapter 11 I discuss the esthetic content of the Warhol/Basquiat collaborations.

There are several examples of the art world demonstrating their intransigence towards the art of Jean-Michel Basquiat. When the Whitney Museum presented the first American retrospective of the artist in 1992, major museums in Washington D.C., Los Angeles, and Chicago all turned down the opportunity to mount this exhibition. One only needs to look at how few artworks by the artist have entered into American museum collections; with the exception of the Whitney Museum, no other New York museum has acquired a painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat! Neither has the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Today, if you ask museumgoers—especially those of the younger generation—what they expect to see when they visit a museum, they will quite often ask "where is the Basquiat?"

Over the years many people committed to the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat have been troubled by how the

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Fred, 1983
Acrylic, spray paint, oil paintstick, photocopy collage, and paper collage on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 96 x 74 inches
244 x 188 cm



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Charles the First (detail), 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas
Triptych: 78 x 62 inches
198 x 158 cm

Museum of Modern Art has failed to properly recognize the work of the artist. In 1984, I arranged for the donation of Basquiat's *Untitled* (1983) (the 57 1/2 x 75 inches silkscreen on canvas, edition of ten, produced by New City Editions, Venice, California) to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I produced this work with the artist and gave a version of it to the museum in honor of my silent partner Max Fenmore. Between 1985 and 2015 it was never exhibited in the museum! Only with the 2015 collaborative promotional campaign of Japanese clothes manufacturer Uniqlo and the Museum of Modern Art was the work finally put on exhibition. Basquiat's *Untitled* was the image used on the garment tag accompanying every item sold in the SPRZ Collection.

Shortly after the release of the *New York Times Magazine* article, one of the artist's most committed early collectors, Herbert and Lenore Schorr, already in possession of several masterworks by the artist, offered the Museum of Modern Art the opportunity to choose a painting from their collection as a gift. As the collectors have noted to me on several occasions (and as expressed to many other people as well), "the museum replied that having a painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat was not even worth the cost of the storage."

What the majority of the critics, major American museums and some collectors failed to recognize was the profundity of the content in the paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Even with only a modest amount of critical literature, it has become more and more evident that Basquiat's art conveys a depth of understanding and insight into commonly recognized universal themes. While critics such as Robert Hughes and Hilton Kramer dismissed the artist's paintings as devoid of meaning, I hope by this examination to reveal the depth of his themes, subjects, and insights. While Basquiat's biography is fascinating and illuminating, particularly in relevance to his paintings, I think the time is right for a more exclusive focus on the artist's subject matter. Basquiat's story will always be of great interest because of the events of his life, but this detracts from the story that the artist tells through his work.

From my research and curatorial work for the most recent American retrospective, "Basquiat," presented by the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Houston Museum of Fine Art in 2005 and 2006, I have come to recognize Basquiat's creative outpourings as an expression of universal themes. His paintings and drawings acknowledge subjects that have been the basis for pictorial expression for centuries, in the creations of many diverse cultures from around the world. Basquiat found his own singular voice in the echoes of Western and non-Western influences across history.

There are different ways to approach the art of Jean-Michel Basquiat. I have chosen a somewhat unconventional approach in deciding *not* to present the work chronologically, starting at the beginning and showing a development from initial expression into full maturity. A critical biographical study of the artist has yet to be done. But at this particular moment in time I think a more comprehensive understanding of Jean-Michel Basquiat's subject matter is of greater urgency. I have challenged myself to look deeper and prove the veracity of my claim that content is finally what distinguishes this artist's creative expression. I have sought another structure to create my Basquiat story.

This study is primarily concerned with the iconography of the artist's paintings and works on paper. The art of Jean-Michel Basquiat champions an heroic black male: a symbol he presents as the embodiment of cultural pride and dignity. By exploring the existential question of his own identity as a young black male in a predominantly white American society, and then developing this beyond the personal, Basquiat expanded his "story" into a universal one relevant to all people.

Prior to a presentation of the artist's themes and subjects, I feel it is important to understand the techniques, materials and artistic strategies employed by the artist in the creation of his work. Beginning with the first studio works in 1981, Basquiat quickly asserted a fierce independence and self-confidence. His work was constantly undergoing change. He was always trying new things, introducing new materials and methods of operation. Even in the short period of eight years, what is especially fascinating is the range and diversity of his working procedures. It is hard to imagine an artist whose work underwent as many different changes, phases or "periods" as did the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat from 1981 until his death in 1988.

Unique among both his contemporaries and most twentieth century painters, Basquiat dedicated a significant portion of his artistic production to drawing and the creation of fully-realized masterworks on paper. With the exception of my previous publication on the artist, *Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawing, Works from the Schorr Family Collection*, which accompanied the 2014 exhibition of the same title at Acquavella Gallery in New York, there has been only a modest focus on Basquiat's works on paper. Chapter 2 of this publication attempts to explain why working on paper was such an important medium for the artist.

In developing this study I have drawn on my own experience. Shortly after presenting the American Basquiat retrospective I produced a major monograph on the internationally acclaimed artist, the late Chris Burden. In preparing this study, our team (myself, the artist and the directors of Locus Plus, a nonprofit arts institution in Newcastle, England) resisted the temptation to present the work chronologically. We recognized that both the diversity of the artist's practice as well as the varying themes and subjects in the work demanded a different kind of structuring. It took us a great deal of time to devise the format. By rejecting a chronological structure we were able to provide greater insight into the artist's vision and intent. I have decided to employ a similar treatment for this book.

From the outset what has motivated this work on Jean-Michel Basquiat is an attempt to achieve a greater understanding of the artist's vision, and the means by which he was able to capture it.

Jean-Michel Basquiat's life and career were far too short. A fair portion of the popular literature on the artist mythologizes the artist's quick demise in similar fashion to that of rock'n'roll legends Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, and Janis Joplin. A central focus of this study is Basquiat's ability to turn to his art as his means of self-exploration and self-discovery. Peter Schjeldahl wrote in his review of the 2011 African sculpture exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "without stories, memory falters; and without memory imagination fails."[5] Over the years, what has drawn people to the art of Jean-Michel Basquiat is not just the artist's compelling personal history, but his approach to his subjects. While far different from the narrative created by a writer or filmmaker, Basquiat's gift lay in his ability to use his skills as a painter and draftsman, and his comfort with both image making and language as his means of telling a story. It was through these stories—the life of a boxer, musician, or members of his crew on the streets of New York City—that the artist was able to employ his capacity for observation. It was through observation that Basquiat mined the depths of his intuition, revealing insight into the forces guiding all of our lives. ■

NOTES

1. *A New Spirit in Painting*, Royal Academy of Arts London. Catalogue published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1981. While Basquiat was not included in this exhibition, by the time of the 1992 Documenta exhibition in Kassel, Germany, he was fully recognized alongside both the American and European painters included in the Royal Academy Exhibition.

2. Jay Z, *Decoded*. New York, 2010, Spiegel and Grau, page 95.

3. Ibid, page 93.

4. Robert Hughes, "Careerism and Hype Amidst the Image Haze," *Time*, June 17, 1985, page 78.

5. Peter Schjeldahl, "Faces in Time, African Tribal Sculpture at the Met," *The New Yorker*, October 31, 2011.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Flexible (detail), 1984
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
102 x 75 inches
259 x 190.5 cm

CHAPTER 1

BASQUIAT IN THE STUDIO: WORKING PROCEDURES AND PICTURE SUPPORTS

AFTER MY INITIAL ENCOUNTER WITH JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT in November 1982, to facilitate the production of a large, ambitious silkscreen print which, upon completion would be titled *Tuxedo*, I regularly visited the artist in his studio on the ground floor of Larry Gagosian's home in Venice, California. While the primary purpose of my visits was to work with Jean-Michel on the production of five other silkscreen editions that we released in 1983, I was drawn to the artist's studio simply to witness the artist at work. Watching Jean-Michel Basquiat at work was one of the most memorable experiences in my professional life. In the studio Basquiat demonstrated pure, raw talent as a painter. The decisions and choices he made in front of a painting could leave you breathless.

From mid-November 1982 through March 1983 I visited Basquiat regularly in his first Venice studio. I reflect back on one memorable moment. For the most part, he worked in the evening, oftentimes from sundown to sun up. The studio consisted of one large room, with canvases placed against each of the walls, and a few tables in the center upon which various paints, brushes, oil paintsticks, pencils, and drawings were laid out. In one corner of the space there was a mattress, next to which there was a boom box and stacks of tapes. The mattress was the one place where you would not get in Jean-Michel's way and could hang out and watch him at work. I was so much drawn to this experience that I would regularly show up sometime after dinner and spend hours on the mattress just observing, and if appropriate, engage the artist in conversation.

One night I came in to find about eight freshly primed blank canvases lining the walls. That night Jean-Michel was in a particularly playful and light mood. He started by applying bold strokes of color to each of the canvases. Within a very short period of time, about an hour, each of the canvases was filled with exciting passages of color, texture, shapes, but no recognizable imagery. At a certain point Jean-Michel looked over toward me, and declared "tonight I am going to paint the history of contemporary art in California." Now, many years later, I recall that while I replied something like "oh good," I'm quite certain that I had no idea of what he had in mind and where he intended to go with this statement.

As an aside, it is helpful to put the artist's statement in context. Larry Gagosian's home was on Market Street in the heart of Venice about a block and a half from the boardwalk and beach. Just down the street was the West Beach Café on North Venice Boulevard.[1] This restaurant/bar functioned as the hub for the Westside art community. Partly due to its exhibition program of newly emerging

contemporary artists from both Los Angeles and New York, many of the local notable artists spent their after-studio hours at the West Beach. Even though Jean-Michel Basquiat was of a different generation and background from the "Venice artists," he not only became acquainted with many of them, but because of his inquisitiveness, also quickly became aware of their work and their careers.

That night, as the canvases became more defined, I could make out recognizable imagery referencing known paintings by many of the Venice artists. One painting started to look like a pastiche of a Sam Francis, another like a Diebenkorn. Another painting was a riff on Billy Al Bengston, while another captured the feeling of Ed Moses' recent work. While Basquiat was devoting many hours each day to the production of work for his upcoming exhibition with Larry Gagosian, he had somehow managed to familiarize himself with the work of the noted artists of his current milieu. And then, sometime in the early hours of the next day, I dozed off. When I awoke, I found myself alone in the studio, surveying the canvases that had so mesmerized me earlier. To my surprise, all evidence of the California School was gone. Jean-Michel had covered over virtually all of the work I had previously seen. All that remained visible from the night before was a small square passage of colorful paint set within an all-white field.

Today it is fair to ask why this is relevant to an understanding of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. A few ideas come to mind. Ever since that night I have recognized the fearlessness Basquiat possessed as an artist. As Basquiat demonstrated that evening in his Venice studio, he was willing to try anything in order to get into a painting. While the rich content of his paintings indicates an underlying artistic direction, the works reveal bold, risk-taking moves. Basquiat continually recognized the need to challenge himself. Painting the history of California art became a kind of provocation, exposing himself to something new and unexpected. Trusting that he had a clear sense of where he was going and what he desired to achieve, Jean-Michel Basquiat allowed both discovery and revision to play a significant part in his pictorial process. He understood that tackling many of the complex, narrative themes and subjects which he desired to incorporate into his pictures would require a good deal of patience and time. He knew that a multiplicity of meanings would only become credible if the actual process of making a painting resulted from the progressive building up of layers of content, form, color, and imagery. Knowing that not each phase or "layer" of a painting would necessarily become part of the final image or composition, Basquiat used each passage of paint as a stepping stone that enabled him to move closer to completion of the work.

Opposite, top to bottom
"Jean-Michel Basquiat"
West Beach Cafe, Venice, CA, 1983

Ocean Front Walk, Venice, CA

Market Street, Venice, CA
Larry Gagosian Residence
Jean-Michel Basquiat's studio, 1982–84

Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Jawbone of an Ass, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
60 x 84 inches
152.5 x 213.5 cm

Notary (1983) is composed of four stretched canvases mounted on exposed wooden supports, which are attached together across the backside of the wooden stretcher bar supports. This same support system is found in two other multi-panel paintings executed at that time, *Mitchell Crew* and *The Nile*. Given that Basquiat made these three major works all at the same time, it is likely that he also then designed the multi-panel picture supports, prior to collaging, drawing or painting on the three canvases. These supports afforded the artist a new scale for his pictures, and announced that the artist was prepared to undertake an ambitious, complex and multi-layered narrative content for his pictures.

The picture support used in these works is interesting in itself, demonstrating Basquiat's desire to develop an alternative to the traditional stretcher bars used for a painting on canvas. In *Notary*, the stretcher bars are not entirely hidden behind the canvas, but are exposed, and cross each other at right angles where the horizontal and vertical stretcher bars meet. At this junction the canvas wraps around and behind the wooden supports, giving the impression that the picture support is a much more "primitive" and spontaneous creation.

Basquiat's innovative picture support was first implemented in a group of single-panel paintings executed the

Opposite
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Ernok), 1982
Acrylic, oil, and oil paintstick
on canvas mounted
on tied wood supports
83 1/2 x 60 inches
212 x 152.5 cm

Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Baby Boom, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and
paper collage on canvas mounted
on tied wood supports
49 x 84 inches
124.5 x 213.5 cm

previous year. In fact, in 1982 the artist created no fewer than sixty-five works employing an "open stretcher bar" system. These include *Jawbone of an Ass*, *The Italian Version of Popeye Has No Pork in his Diet*, *Untitled (Hand Anatomy)*, *LNPARK*, *Carbon Dating System Versus Scotchproof Tape and Natives Carrying Some Guns*, *Bibles*, *Amorites on Safari*. In the artist's memorable exhibition at the Fun Gallery in 1982, most of the works exhibited featured this same support system. In *Untitled (Crown Hotel)*, *Three Quarters of Olympia Minus the Servant*, *St Joe Louis Surrounded by Snakes* (1982), *Baby Boom* (1982) and *Phooey* (1982), the crossed wood stretchers extend much farther out from the edge of the canvas and are crudely tied together with twine, as though they had been spontaneously constructed.

In *Untitled (Ernok)* (1982), Basquiat departs even more from a classical picture support. Nearly a third of the picture support actually becomes part of the pictorial field. The canvas, which is stapled on the exposed crossbars, covers just the top two thirds of the actual support system. The bottom third of the picture is an exposed support system constructed from crossed wooden pieces tied together with twine and two diagonal slats running from vertical pieces toward the bottom center. In addition, Basquiat added twine running diagonally. As a structure, the simplicity of the support lends credibility and legitimacy to the raw expression in the painting. The right arm of the figure rises upward while a foreshortened left arm and hand extends out toward the viewer. The sense of energy in the figure's limbs matches the exposed forms used as the picture support.

Perhaps the most playful and inventive of the works employing exposed picture supports is *One Million Yen*, included in the 1982 Fun Gallery Exhibition.[2] This work also has exposed wood slats held together by twine, but the canvas is not neatly and evenly wrapped behind the slats. Rather, the left and right sides of the canvas picture surface have been stapled to the wood slats, and lay flat across these supports. The overall shape of this canvas is not conventional. The work shows two other variations on the "standard" open support system. First, the same twine used to hold the wooden slats in place is also used to create

TSENG KWONG CHI
Jean-Michel Basquiat under One Million Yen,
Fun Gallery, New York, 1982

a crude yet effective hanging device, wrapping around each of the top crossed stretcher bars. Second, while the top portion of the canvas forms a rectangle, vertical wood slats extend beyond this rectangular shape down towards the floor; a separate piece of canvas has been stapled across the lower portion of the vertical wood supports.

While there are several other examples of odd or irregular picture supports, both the support and picture surface of *One Million Yen* are like no other in the oeuvre. They challenge many of our assumptions about what constitutes a "serious" picture. Composed from discarded materials and looking "thrown together," the piece feels as if it had been retrieved from the street. The works utilizing this form of picture support are an acknowledgment of the very world where the artist had lived and worked. In its break with formality the painting becomes accessible, inviting the viewer to trust and be comfortable with what the artist presents. While these 1982 picture supports may seem primitive, they have the same sophistication and intelligence of other critically acclaimed contributions to modernist pictorial esthetics.

As Rene Ricard perceptively noted, Basquiat's picture supports basically declare that we are dealing with a "product modern civilization has no use for."[3] At the same time, the imagery, words and symbols of these pictures draw us back to a world which is serious, demanding our full respect and consideration. Basquiat's innovative approach to the picture support is a dichotomy of seemingly different messages. What is presented does not rise to the standards associated with fine or "high" art. It appears to be a devaluation of what it signifies. And yet, both imagery and the painting technique speak of experiences and associations we accept and greatly value. Basquiat's layering of gestural brushstrokes tie the painting *One Million Yen* to an historical and widely respected pictorial tradition. Basquiat, clearly understanding the implication of his radical picture support, uses conventional words, phrases and symbols in the painting. The repeated references to money imply its worth and value. Ultimately, we feel pulled in two conflicting directions. The picture support, informal and handmade, seems tentative. References in the work satisfy our need to impose systems, rules and order.

Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers) (1982) is constructed from a number of separate wood panels which have been attached together to form two main rectangular picture surfaces joined at the center line of the painting. The top half of the picture consists of three wooden panels, each supported at their edges on the reverse by wooden slat supports resembling stretcher beams. The lower half of the picture has one panel, with similar wood slat supports attached to the four front edges of the wood panel. The two halves (top and bottom) are attached to each other with bolts running through the horizontal beams, meeting at the central horizon line of the picture support. The overall impression of the physical picture support is of two contrasting surfaces. While the top surface projects forward, the bottom half, framed by wood slats at the edge, recedes away from the viewer. It is clear that Basquiat planned this elaborately constructed surface carefully to support and enhance the sophisticated set of themes and subjects in the painting.

Basquiat created a comparable picture support in *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)*, the companion painting to *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)*. Together, these two works show the artist exploring a wide range of innovative new solutions to the traditional picture support. *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* is distinguished by its bold pictorial ambition. Nowhere in the artist's oeuvre prior to *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* do we encounter this range and diversity of pictorial strategies as well as the confidence to pursue untested new techniques of paint application. Jean-Michel Basquiat saw this work as an opportunity to expand the limits of his process.

Basquiat started the top section of *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* by covering a significant portion of the picture support with a collage of photocopied drawings on the wood surface, then adding an intense and highly unusual hue of yellow paint. Oil paintstick was then applied heavily, building up full figural images, heads and symbols (such as the crown, a recurring and iconic motif). In other areas the artist obliterated these images with acrylic paint. At the top, images were painted, partially covered over, and painted again until the entire pictorial surface is a cacophony of highly charged images, lines, shapes, and colors all interacting harmoniously.

In contrast, the bottom portion of *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* conforms to more traditional expressionist pictorial practice. While the artist has applied photocopied images in two places, this portion of the picture is almost entirely built up with a range of paint strokes, some executed with the brush bristles, some with the wood tip of the brush, and others directly with the artist's fingers and hands. This part of the work is distinguished by a daring application of loose, free, and bold gestural strokes, and several generous handfuls of goose feathers. The expressive brushwork in the bottom portion of *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* is especially noteworthy because it is rarely found in any of the other work from this seminal moment in the artist's career, and it demonstrates Basquiat's newfound confidence. He was keenly aware of the historical precedents for his techniques. We are especially reminded

Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, paper collage, tar and feather on masonite
Polyptych: 96 x 90 inches
244 x 228.5 cm

Opposite
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Collection, 1954
Oil, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, wood, metal, and mirror on three canvas panels
80 x 96 x 3 1/2 inches
203.2 x 243.8 x 8.9 cm

of the bold, even brash style of Robert Rauschenberg in his early *Combine* paintings, especially those dating from 1954, such as *Collection* (in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). While the top part of *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* might bring to mind Willem de Kooning's integration of figure and abstraction, the lower portion of the work, with its highly charged palette of orange, yellow and red, and repetition of dark circular forms, suggests an awareness of Rauschenberg.

Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers) is a prime example of one of Basquiat's most important recurring themes: the transformation of an individual personage into a heroic icon. Here, the artist shows a group of figures whom he would have observed and encountered daily on the streets of New York City, his "crew." In this painting Basquiat portrays these individuals both as full-length figures and as heads. *Six Crimee* (1982), exhibited with *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* at the Larry Gagosian Gallery in 1982, also includes a group of similar images. In some instances, Basquiat even captured the physical features of a recognizable person. Such is the case in one of the three standing figures in *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* where the artist positioned the head of Henry Geldzahler, then one of the impresarios of the New York art world, on top of the body of a standing black male figure.

While portraiture, especially self portraiture, would feature more and more in Basquiat's pictorial output, the artist's primary concern in *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* was broader in subject matter: a compelling iconography proclaiming a newfound freedom for the young black male, the figures conveying confidence and conviction. *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* followed a small series of paintings depicting a single black male figure, *Irony of Negro Policeman* (1981), and *Untitled* (1981), each engaging in a specific kind of work or labor. In contrast, *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* focuses on a symbolic moment when Basquiat's young black heroes have arrived, strutting and manifesting their strength and independence. Basquiat painted two of the figures with crowns directly over their heads. They do not symbolize royalty or divinity. Rather, the combination of crown and hero is a declaration of liberation from social, economic, and political oppression. The two central figures have the scales of justice at their feet, to the right he has placed a floating angel. The iconographic references represent rising above the pain, suffering and degradation associated with the act of being "tarred and feathered."

Throughout Jean-Michel Basquiat's career, his political and social commentary functioned as a way to reveal deeper truths about the individual, and expressed the artist's worldview. Nowhere is this more evident than in the painting *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)*. This seminal work, one of the earliest and most fully realized works

with these subjects, depicts realities of the black man in urban white America. The bottom half of the work, in its tactile and visual immediacy, alludes to the realm of man's physical being. In contrast, the top portion of this work presents figures (and their accompanying symbols) rising above the physical. Hovering in an otherworldly aura of radiating yellow, the figures in *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* are liberated from worldly concerns. Having transcended physical as well as emotional suffering, Basquiat's figures rest in peace.

The procedures and techniques Basquiat employed in the execution of *Notary* are equally noteworthy. Basquiat initiated this work by taking all five sheets of his just completed silkscreen print, *Untitled: From Leonardo* (1983), printed on a delicate Japanese rice paper, and applying them to his newly primed canvas picture support. When he received the completed print (produced in Venice, California at New City Editions) in his New York studio in April 1983, the artist was excited by how much the images resembled Renaissance parchment and conveyed a feeling of the past. The imagery of this work was taken directly from Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, and the processes Basquiat used for *Untitled: From Leonardo* were designed to look ancient. What better way to christen an ambitious new painting than by transforming its raw pictorial surface into something imbued with age and history?

Having begun *Notary* by laying down references to an historical past, Basquiat proceeded by both obliterating and building upon it. The artist's next round of activity consisted of applying dense layers of color over large areas of the three canvases. The broad passages of black paint on the right and central panels of the work, and teal applied prominently to the left and central panels, "blocked out" sections of the canvas. The artist then orchestrated a complex symphony of images, words, symbols, and references in paint.

Robert Farris Thompson perceptively noted that Jean-Michel Basquiat "weaves abstraction into content art."[4] We can go much further. Basquiat's accretion of colored shapes functions as a backdrop, a stage set, in front of which his actors are free to perform. Sometimes the artist's actors take the form of a figure or group of figures, while other times they are incarnated as words, phrases or symbols. Because Basquiat's references are so disparate, something is required to hold them together. Basquiat's background "set up" facilitates this harmonization.

Notary is perhaps Basquiat's most complete and compelling use of this pictorial strategy. He turned to it regularly in a number of paintings executed between 1982 and 1984, including *In Italian* (1983), *The Nile* (1983), *Charles the First* (1982), *Melting Point of Ice* (1984), *Sienna* (1984), *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* (1983), and *Max Roach* (1983). While each of these paintings presents an array of subjects and employ widely varying techniques, they all share the common feature of a backdrop against which unfolds a pictorial layering of information and narrative content.

In Basquiat's painting *In Italian* (1983), painted at about the same time as *Notary*, the "blocking" of background colored shapes facilitates the "theatricality" of the artist's figures, words and phrases. The rich coloration of the background of *In Italian* is one of the artist's more striking achievements. With large swatches of baby blue, aqua, pink and black, it sets the stage for the artist's characters to come forth. The gorilla, a mask-like human head, the profile of a 1951 Liberty Head nickel, or the partially crossed out phrase CROWN OF THORNS—all these images and texts, as if placed on an stage, feel connected and interacting. This pictorial strategy enabled Basquiat to harmonize the diverse inspirations he experienced on the street or in front of the TV. In a sense, the background of *In Italian* is like a television screen, with images, words and phrases becoming the constantly changing broadcast of information. In this context, each piece of "information" is given equal importance. There are no hierarchies.

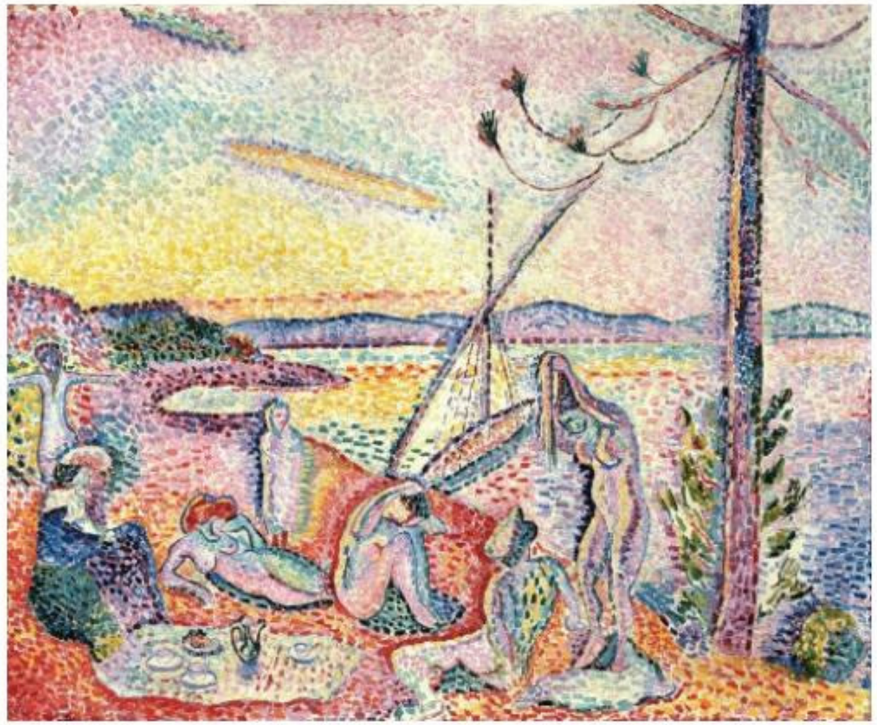
In Italian presents another important aspect of Basquiat's pictorial practice, his use of color. Beginning in the later months of 1981 and continuing throughout 1982–83, and in a few 1984 paintings, Basquiat produced works dominated by one, two or three highly unusual, unexpected colors. Color is the underlying pictorial schema of such key works as *Six Crimee* (1982), *Untitled (LA Painting)* (1982), *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump* (1982), *Natives Carrying Some Guns* (1982), *In Italian* (1983), *Untitled (Two Heads on Gold)* (1982), *Hollywood Africans* (1983) and *Mitchell Crew* (1983). As especially evident in paintings from 1982 to 1983, Basquiat's choice of bright, highly luminous and often unmixed color was one of the artist's primary means of instilling a subject or event with energy and life. For the most part, Basquiat's palette is expressed in the backgrounds. In his painting *In Italian*, a luminescent green is juxtaposed with a sensuous pink and airy aqua, setting the stage for Basquiat's images and an array of words HOEK, CORPUS, BLOOD, TEETH, CROWN OF THORNS and DIAGRAM OF HEART PUMPING BLOOD.

Perhaps the most sophisticated and subtle example of Basquiat as colorist is his 1984 painting *Max Roach*. Recalling Rothko and Kline as much as de Kooning, the

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
In Italian, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and marker on canvas mounted on wood supports
Diptych: 88 1/2 x 80 inches
225 x 203 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
The Nile, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas mounted
on wood supports
Triptych: 68 x 141 inches
172.5 x 358 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Piscine Versus the Best Hotels, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 62 1/4 x 82 3/4 inches
158 x 210 cm



HENRI MATISSE
Luxe, Calme et Volupté, 1904
Oil on canvas
37 x 46 inches
98.5 x 118.5 cm

painting is one of the most abstract works in Basquiat's oeuvre. Over half the pictorial surface features layers of red paint. The partial image of a lone drummer and his instrument are barely revealed. Through the application of broad passages of color resulting in highly simplified shapes, figuration and abstraction are tightly interwoven. Here, Basquiat's use of color adds a psychological aspect to the painting. *Max Roach*, composed mostly of abstract passages of paint, is much less concerned with traditional representation.

I have always remembered the day at Larry Gagosian's West Hollywood gallery in 1983 when David Hockney dropped in. David and I had become friends a few years earlier and enjoyed talking about contemporary art. That day I witnessed David engaging the work of an artist he had only recently come to know. From Hockney's observations of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat I came to more fully appreciate him as a painter concerned with the representation of landscape. While Basquiat was being recognized for the social, cultural, and political content of his art, his talent as a landscape painter had been totally overlooked. Hockney, who had devoted a significant part of his creative life to the exploration of landscape imagery, saw in Basquiat's work a fresh, new approach to the portrayal of nature.

Nowhere is this made more evident than in *Piscine Versus the Best Hotels* (1982). While the subject of the work is not exclusively a landscape, a large part of the lower half of the work represents a group of figures swimming in a body of water. In this work, water is represented by two abstract passages of turquoise-blue paint above and below seven figures. Posed both standing and reclining, these figures are reminiscent of Matisse, especially the idyllic setting of his painting *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* (1904). Filling up a rectangular section of the picture, and reading as a window into which the viewer is invited to gaze, Basquiat presents an idyllic world.

The landscape portion of *Piscine Versus the Best Hotels* is not only the work's central motif, it also links together the different texts as well as drawn and painted figures filling out the adjacent areas. The feeling of an ambience or atmosphere pervading the disparate pieces of this work reveal Basquiat's understanding of cubist esthetics. While individual pieces of *Piscine Versus the Best Hotels* may feel disjointed or disconnected, they convey a commonality. The artist's integration of image and text facilitates this sense of visual continuity and cohesiveness. David Hockney, who in his own work applied Picasso's cubism for a new means of expression, would have recognized Basquiat's adaptation of cubism in his treatment of landscape.

It is instructive to consider how Basquiat's treatment of image/content vs. pictorial backdrop distinguishes itself from that of his predecessors. In this regard, we need to consider the work of two painters: the paintings of Willem de Kooning from the mid 1950s and the *Combine* paintings of Robert Rauschenberg from 1954 through the early 1960s. What Basquiat shares with de Kooning is a "theatricalization" of his content, whether it be abstract or representational. In *Gotham News* (1956), de Kooning applied broad strokes of a single hue filling portions of the background against which more animated gestures move across the picture surface. These broader passages of a single color thereby "set the stage," animating and bringing life—air and space—into the picture. This is achieved with the proximity of foreground and background, which assures, even heightens the integration of the picture. *Gotham News* does not imply or convey a depth of space; rather, the "actors," the gestural passages

Above
WILLEM DE KOONING
Gotham News, 1955
Oil on canvas
69 x 79 inches
175.3 x 200.7 cm

Opposite
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and spray paint on canvas
94 1/2 x 165 1/2 inches
240 x 420.5 cm

of paint, perform on a narrow proscenium, barely distinguished from, and in some instances intertwined with, the background stage set. While conveying a feeling of moving "in and out," de Kooning does not allow the viewer an escape into a deeper space. Basquiat is much less concerned with integrating foreground and background, and shows less interest in spatial modulation. In the work of the younger painter, space flattens out. This is especially made evident by the inclusion of words and texts which inherently exist on a flat surface. De Kooning was more aligned with a Renaissance tradition and the harmonization of content. While acknowledging Renaissance pictorial values, Basquiat was equally drawn to the directness of information as presented in the work of the pop art masters.

Rauschenberg's *Combines* are a more immediate source for Basquiat. Basquiat was especially drawn to Rauschenberg's ability to fuse the world of the street and the "high" art of painting. Rauschenberg also perpetuates de Kooning's concern for a harmonization of disparate information and content. His passages of paint, weaving in and out of more recognizable imagery and references, result in order and harmony. Basquiat presents a much more chaotic world view, the intensity and density of his contrasting references and surrounding passages of paint conveying a harsher reality. While Basquiat turned to his predecessors for pictorial direction, he maintained a different worldview.

Having opened his 1983 exhibition at the Larry Gagosian Gallery in West Hollywood in early March, Jean-Michel Basquiat returned to New York, where virtually overnight he completed some of his most important paintings including *Notary*, *The Nile*, *In Italian* and *Mitchell Crew*. Later that year he was drawn back to Los Angeles, which afforded him a buffer from an increasingly challenging New York art world. With his return to Los Angeles, Basquiat opened his own studio, again on Market Street in Venice.

Located one block off the beach, Jean-Michel mostly avoided the constant coming and goings from the Venice boardwalk. Residing at L'Hermitage Hotel in West Hollywood, Basquiat usually arrived at his studio in the afternoon, working late into the evening, sometimes into the next day. The back door of the studio opened onto a small courtyard, which was enclosed by an eight foot high, deteriorating slat wood fence. One night, while taking a break from painting, Jean-Michel walked out onto this space only to be startled by the presence of a homeless man who had somehow managed to slip into the courtyard between two sections of the fence. This experience had a strong impact upon the artist and he decided to remove the wood fence, essentially returning the patio to the Venice ambience. While Basquiat would no longer have an enclosed patio, he would no longer need to fear someone sleeping in his backyard and invading his privacy. Having made plans for the disposal of the wood fencing material, Jean-Michel instructed that the now deconstructed fence be brought into the studio.

Within a day or two the wood slats started to take on a new life. Using longer sections of the wood fencing as vertical support elements, the artist instructed his assistants to stack the individual wood slats horizontally, thereby turning the fence material into new, unique picture supports. Here in Venice, some three thousand miles from his earlier pictorial expression on the walls of Manhattan, Basquiat had now found the means of bringing the wall into the studio.

Picture supports made from wood slat fencing material were used in more than seventeen paintings made between 1983 and 1986.[5] The earliest and most recognized of these works were *Gold Griot* and *Flexible*.[6] These two works signaled to Basquiat a new means of integrating his art with his concern for life on the street. In contrast to the earlier exposed stretcher bar supports, these wood picture supports introduced a new formalism into the work. The matter-of-factness of the earlier works questioned whether the picture support fulfilled the function for which it was conceived. With the wood fence supports Basquiat declared that his imagery must be regarded with the utmost respect and seriousness. In their weight, density and scale, these works take hold of and arrest the eye. Like a stop sign,

ANDY WARHOL
Gold Marilyn Monroe, 1962
Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas
83 1/4 x 57 inches
210.8 x 144.7 cm

these structures cause the viewer to slow down, paying homage to that which is represented. These new picture supports both command and direct. They become active participants in the way the viewer receives and digests the content depicted on their surface.

It is not coincidental, that concurrent with these new picture supports, Basquiat introduced more authoritative imagery in the form of a new representation of the standing black male figure. While the figure depicted in *Gold Griot* shares some similarity with the central figure of *Notary* (and to a certain degree the figures depicted in *The Philistines*), it distinguishes itself in two respects. In *Notary*, the central figure is part of an overall narrative content. It is intertwined in a cacophony of images and symbols. In contrast, the central figure of *Gold Griot* exists in solitude, looming front and center over the viewer. Here Basquiat's concern is for an immediate, frontal engagement with his figure. By portraying the figure's ribs as horizontal bands running parallel to and echoing the shape of the wooden slats, Basquiat flattens out the figure. He integrates the image and support, adopting a formal pictorial solution more commonly associated with minimal painting. In this regard, *Gold Griot* brings to representational image-making the same formal rigor Jasper Johns achieved in his American flag and Frank Stella applied to his early geometric compositions.

Gold Griot pays homage to pop art esthetics. Enhanced by the application of gold paint on the wooden slats, Basquiat negates the viewer's inclination to move into an illusionistic space traditionally associated with a picture surface. Like a pop art painting, such as Andy Warhol's *Gold Marilyn*, *Gold Griot* provides no place "into" which

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Gold Griot, 1984
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
117 x 73 inches
297 x 185.5 cm

the viewer can retreat. We are invited to engage this figure in "our" space. Basquiat's figure is directly in front of us, without illusion. *Gold Griot* is nearly ten feet in height. In the photograph of Basquiat at work on the painting in his Venice studio (p. 22), the head of his figure dwarfs the artist's beneath it.[7] The concrete nature of Basquiat's materials, and the tight, cohesive relationship between image and surface, give *Gold Griot* a unique and imposing presence.

The figure in *Gold Griot* cannot be viewed as a mere mortal. Rather, Basquiat presents it as the manifestation of a higher power or will. While many of Basquiat's earlier images of a single black male portrayed specific people, including the artist himself and well-known personalities from sports and music, the personage of *Gold Griot* is not an identifiable character, but represents someone removed from our daily lived experience. In this regard, it is instructive to contrast the figures of *Gold Griot* and *Profit 1*, painted almost two years earlier. In *Profit 1*, the figure is represented with both arms raised, like a cactus plant, the gesture suggesting some kind of worldly achievement. The gold and red crown of thorns or halo suspended over the figure's head directs us to consider it as sacred or blessed, but its submersion in a black field surrounded by cryptic scrawls and symbols establishes that it resides here on earth.

Gold Griot presents a significantly different kind of figural presence. This figure is as much a divine apparition as a living human being. With its ethereal gold background surface, the figure of *Gold Griot* pays homage to sculptural representations of the divine in various sub-Saharan African cultures. An oversized head, wide, slanted and partially closed eyes, a broad flat nose and mouth with

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Grillo, 1984
Oil, acrylic, oil paintstick, photocopy collage and nails on wood
96 x 211 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches
243.8 x 537.2 x 47 cm

prominent teeth, and cowry shells surrounding the eyes and along the hairline all indicate that Basquiat was influenced by sub-Saharan African source material (more extensively discussed in the chapter on the image of the black male in this volume). Instilling his figure with the same attributes of authority and/or the sacred, the artist made an even stronger statement by devising a new picture support for his paintings of kings and divinity figures.

The presentation of figurative imagery on a wood support finds its most complex expression in *Grillo*, executed in the later half of 1984. *Grillo* is one of the largest works in Basquiat's oeuvre, close to twenty feet in length, and eight feet in height. It is further distinguished by its placement on the floor. Consisting of four separate wooden structures attached together, the work stands apart from all other works produced by the artist. The work is composed of three sections of thin wood slats, akin to the support used in *Gold Griot*, with the addition of a three dimensional, box-like structure. On top of the painted surface of the center panel, the artist has attached a thin piece of wood into which a number of nails have been hammered. A similar wooden slat studded with nails is attached to the outside section of the structure at the right side of the work.

The object quality of this work recalls Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines*, which pictorially integrate images and objects from everyday life and expressionist paint handling. In contrast to the work of the older artist, Basquiat's concern is the theatrical presentation of his characters. While Rauschenberg's use of everyday objects is grounded in compositional unity and harmony, Basquiat's construction is driven by a desire to bring to life the "actors" portrayed in the work. The structure of *Grillo* is like a stage set, allowing the viewer to watch an unfolding narrative.

Grillo presents two highly charged and energized actors, each a different expression of the integration of form and spirit. Because both figures derive from similar sub-Saharan African sources, one might conclude that they are related. A careful reading points to different symbolic functions. Alongside the head of the larger of the two figures positioned on the far left panel of the painting, Basquiat has attached a short piece of wood into which he has hammered nails. Possibly alluding to a crown of thorns, the figure takes on a divine identity. Above the head of the figure on the central panel, the artist has painted a large yellow crown. Next to the crown is a photocopied drawing depicting five small figures with arms raised overhead. These figures represent a group of servants attending their king, whose own raised arms and crown indicate his power and authority over an earthly dominion.

The larger of the two figures depicted on the left panel holds in his upraised left hand a torch or flame suggesting a victorious moment—a moment of liberation and freedom. While the stature of this figure suggests authority, it exudes a different kind of power. This figure is an expression of divinity resulting from interior spiritual understanding. It contrasts with Basquiat's king (in the central panel) who is invested with power over others (represented by the servants). Basquiat has portrayed these two figures with the subtlest of distinctions between the two. Supporting this dichotomy, the green panel of the painting refers to our earthly existence, with the rough outlines of a tall, urban structure, a black featureless head, and texts with references to minerals and building materials. In sharp contrast, the box-like construction on the far right is an illusive, abstract form devoid of imagery and references. It is rare to find such a large portion of a painting by Basquiat consisting solely of non-referential passages of paint. Here, in one work, the viewer is suspended between the temporal and the otherworldly. Basquiat's two figures may be viewed as the guardians watching over mutually existing realms of experience. ■

NOTES

1. Basquiat had an exhibition of his work at the restaurant in 1983, curated by the author. The West Beach Café had regular, bi-monthly exhibition programs between 1981 and 1988 featuring the work of leading contemporary artists from Los Angeles and New York. The Basquiat exhibition is noted in all of the artist's biographies.

2. The work may be best remembered from the 1982 photograph taken by Tseng Kwong Chi at the Fun Gallery in which the artist reclines on a sofa beneath the painting. Photo reproduced in *Basquiat*, Galerie Enrico Navarra, vol. 2, 2010 edition, page 6.

3. Rene Ricard, "The Radiant Child," *Artforum*, December 1981, pages 35-43.

4. Robert Farris Thompson, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, (exhibition catalogue). New York, Mary Boone-Michael Werner Gallery, 1985.

5. While the first wood slat picture supports came from previously existing fences, in his New York studio the artist made several wood slat picture supports from material purchased at a lumber yard.

6. Eli Broad quickly acquired *Gold Griot* from Larry Gagosian; the artist kept *Flexible* for his own collection.

7. When the work was exhibited in the 2006 retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, it was hung approximately thirty inches off the floor. At that height the work had a towering presence in the midst of the surrounding paintings.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Man with Hat), 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
59 1/2 x 40 inches
151 x 101.5 cm

CHAPTER 2

WORKS ON PAPER IN THE OEUVRE OF JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

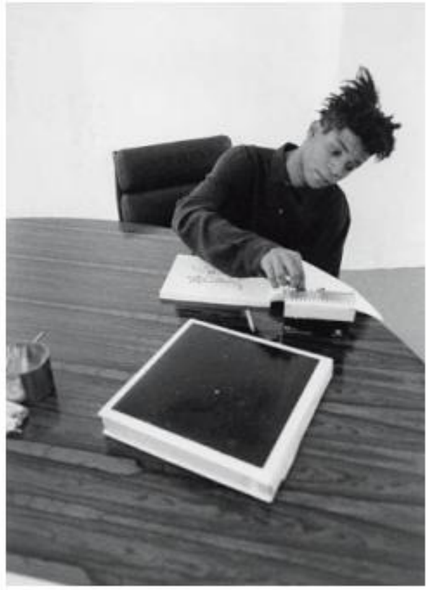
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF FROM HIS contemporaries by the number of works on paper he executed, as well as by the level of artistic achievement he realized in the medium. In nine years of art production, Basquiat created an astounding number of works on paper, including many masterworks rivaling his paintings.

According to the artist's father, Gerard, Jean-Michel Basquiat drew from a very early age. As he noted, "his mother got him started and she pushed him. She was actually a very good artist."[2] While other kids occupied their time with physical activity, Jean-Michel could be found drawing, often using paper his father brought home from his accounting firm, creating image after image. Early in his life, he began to engage with the process of drawing and learned important lessons, which would inform his future practice as an artist.

As a draftsman, the young artist discovered that he could shut out the many stimuli constantly bombarding him from the outside world; at the same time, he could enable impressions, thoughts, memories, associations, fantasies, and observations to simply pass through him onto a sheet of paper. He did not make "studies" to work out ideas or themes to apply to a more complete work of art. Basquiat discovered that drawing was a process of "channeling" in which he essentially functioned as a medium, without editing, prioritizing, or judgment. Occasionally, a theme or element would appear in another drawing or painting. But even in those cases, Basquiat's natural tendency was to treat each drawing as a discrete work of art that could stand on its own.

For most contemporary painters, the process of drawing is a means of working out pictorial solutions to be integrated into a painting. With the exception of Picasso, few acclaimed painters of the twentieth century invested the same time and energy to works on paper that they did in their painting. Yes, twentieth-century painters drew and made masterful works in this medium, but drawing was always a secondary concern. For Basquiat there is often less of a distinction, in terms of intent, between working on paper and on canvas.

In many ways, Basquiat felt most at ease when working on paper. In order to understand this, it is important to consider certain facts about the artist's career, his personality, and psychological make-up. He could work on paper virtually anywhere, at any time, without needing studio space. One of my most indelible impressions of Basquiat



is that he always seemed to be at work. Whether in a restaurant, car, or hotel room, he often had an oil paintstick or pencil in his hand, and a sheet of paper. From 1981 until the time of his death in August 1988, Basquiat had forty-four one-man exhibitions.[3] He attended thirty to thirty-five of these shows, which were presented in cities throughout the United States, Europe, Japan, and one exhibition in West Africa. Basquiat made four or five trips a year for the purpose of exhibiting his art. That he made an almost equal number of trips for his own pleasure leads to the conclusion that he was regularly on the move. As a traveling young artist it was common practice for Basquiat to undertake works on paper—a flexible, portable medium enabling him to create while fulfilling his need to explore. Holed up in a hotel room, Basquiat spent a good deal of time with his drawing materials.

While at this time there is no precise documentation of the number of works on paper executed between 1980 and 1988, it is my estimation that Basquiat produced between eight hundred and fifty and one thousand. (This is in addition to the approximately one thousand paintings and assemblage object-paintings.) While there has been speculation that the artist created "thousands" of works on paper, I think this is highly unlikely. To date, the primary documentation of these is the volume *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Works on Paper*, published by Galerie Enrico Navarra in Paris in 1999, which identifies around three hundred. Considering the number of works that have either come to the market via auction, or have been submitted to the estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat for authentication (and which are not listed in the Navarra publication), it is my opinion (one shared by Enrico Navarra) that a smaller number of works on paper should be attributed to the artist. While significantly less than previously assumed, it remains a very high number. Of the known works on paper by Basquiat, close to forty percent were produced in just two years: 1982 and 1983. It is also noteworthy that many of the artist's most accomplished works in his final two years were produced on large sheets of paper, which were then laid down onto canvas. These were conceived, executed, and exhibited as paintings. Even if the artist had produced an equal number of works on paper between 1980 and 1988, it would add up to approximately one hundred works on paper per year. Also, noting the complexity of the imagery and texts in as many as one quarter of all works produced on paper leads to the conclusion that the medium of drawing played a very significant part in the artist's creative life.

With the exception of *The Daros Suite* of thirty-two drawings that Basquiat produced in 1982–83, none of the works on paper produced by him were titled by the artist. In my correspondence with the Daros Collection, they have confirmed that each of the thirty-two works on paper by Basquiat is signed, titled, and in some instances dated on the verso.[4] That the artist titled each of these works, in contrast to almost all of his other works on paper, reflects Basquiat's intent to present these works as an exhibition with Bruno Bischofberger.[5] While some of Basquiat's drawings have been published with titles, they were titled after they left the artist's possession, and show the owner's desire to add additional context and meaning. That almost all of Basquiat's works on paper were untitled neither diminishes their importance nor allows us to consider them as less meaningful than those paintings titled by the artist. I think that the lack of titling of drawings has more to do with the pace of their production. Once the artist completed a work on paper he immediately went to the next. Missing titles can also be explained by the fact that the artist kept many of his works on paper; typically, Basquiat would neither title nor sign a work until it left his possession. As such, many were neither titled nor signed. It is also noteworthy that during Basquiat's life only a few collectors were seriously committed to collecting his works on paper.

While an evaluation of the artist's works on paper reveals a tremendous range of subject matter, and techniques and procedures utilized in their production, what is especially striking is the intensity of focus conveyed in many of these works, sometimes greater than in his paintings. There may be a clear explanation: the artist had a significantly different physical relationship with his materials while working on paper. While the act of painting was a private activity, where Basquiat was removed from the outside world in his studio and directly engaged with the work before him, it occurred in a space large enough for other, sometimes distracting social functions to take place. When he painted on a canvas hung on the wall, there was the possibility of being less inwardly-focused. When Basquiat was working on a sheet of paper, he was either on the floor, seated at a table, or reclining on a bed or couch. The paper upon which he was working would have been beneath his head, and his focus down, away from the environment around him. He could be completely immersed in the work.

Words and texts played such an integral part of Basquiat's visual language that his process creating works on paper was like normal writing activity. While writing, the position of the body naturally creates a degree of separation of the writer from his surroundings. Because Basquiat's drawings seamlessly integrate imagery and text (whether it is a word, sentence, or several lines of text), it became natural for him to apply the basic process of writing when making most of his works on paper.

Basquiat could easily execute a complex work on paper, full of texts and images, in an hour. Given that most of Basquiat's works on paper were relatively modest in size, he would often complete one without interruption. (Most of Basquiat's works on paper measure 22 x 30 inches or 32 x 40 inches; a few executed in 1982 measure 60 x 40 inches, and there is a very small number made on larger sheets of paper.) I can think of at least two occasions during which he produced as many as twenty very complicated works on paper over the course of twenty-four hours! When he focused on a group of drawings, time would literally slip away. Watching the artist at work, you often had the feeling that even though you were occupying the same space, he had removed himself from your presence. Having found the means of separating himself from his surroundings, he would not resume contact until the work was completed.

For Jean-Michel Basquiat, drawing began with conscious as well as unconscious observation and processing of source material. He approached this with eyes and mind wide open, constantly absorbing, rarely judging. His sources were an amalgamation of his own personal experiences combined with his continually inquisitive engagement with a plethora of subjects: world history, mythology, scientific data, sports, music personalities and history, anthropology, human anatomy and physiology, and non-Western cultures. A good portion of what Basquiat consumed was the result of his experience as a young, black urban male. He had the unique ability to combine references and topics, often transforming or altering them from their original meaning, context, and usage.

His ability to integrate image and text resulted in a seamless interplay between these two traditionally distinct media. For Basquiat, writing a text was just like drawing an image. There are no gaps between image and text, no demarcation lines articulating where one ends and the other begins, and there is no sense that one is less important than the other. This is only made more evident by the density of "information" presented. In Basquiat's drawings, there is rarely any breathing room. The viewer is engaged and drawn into an intricate and complex journey through a maze of references that make little rational sense but nevertheless seem significant.

Basquiat's integration of disparate references and sources recalls the work of certain surrealists as well as the work of Robert Rauschenberg. The choices of the surrealists were highly unusual, distinctive, and more often than not full of pre-existing esthetic content. Their objects and images were carefully selected. For this group of artists, editing was an important part of their process. Rauschenberg's presentation of source material was more

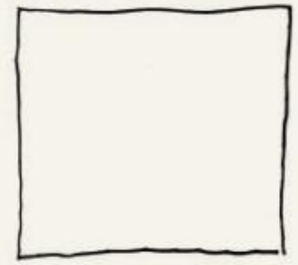
YOSHITAKA UCHIDA
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Akira Ikeda Gallery/Tokyo, November 9, 1985

Following pages
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (From a Suite of Fourteen Drawings), 1981
Ink, crayon, and acrylic on paper
Each: 30 x 22 inches
76 x 56 cm

PAY FOR SOUP
BUILD A FORT
SET THAT ON FIRE.

WHOLE LIVERY LINE
BOW LIKE THIS WITH
BIGMONEY ALL CRUSHED
INTO THESE FEET©

ORIGIN OF COTTON



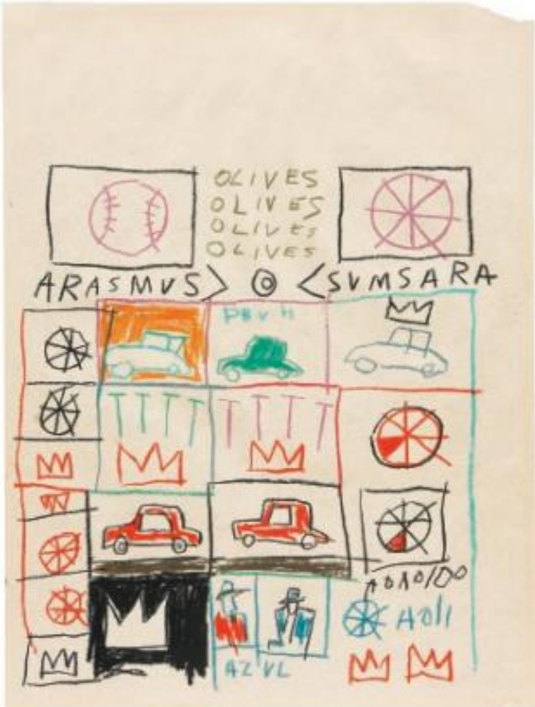
NO MUNDANE OPTIONS.

OLD TIN©

TAR TOWN©

JIMMY BEST ON HIS
BACK TO THE SUCKERPUNCH
OF HIS CHILDHOOD FILES©

MILK©



Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Grid), 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
23 1/2 x 17 3/4 inches
58.5 x 45.5 cm

Opposite top
EDWARD KEATING/
NEW YORK TIMES PICTURES
Children playing
the street game "Skelly"
Beekman Avenue, Bronx,
New York, 1995

Opposite bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1981
Acrylic and spray paint
on canvas
79 x 111 inches
200.5 x 282 cm

egalitarian. For him, the images and objects he used to make his work were more specific to his own experience—to the life he lived, and the social, cultural and political events with which he was personally familiar.

While Basquiat was keenly aware of the precedent of both the surrealists and Rauschenberg, there are key distinctions and differences. Basquiat's sources are even more expansive, reflecting a larger range of observation as well as inquisitiveness. Basquiat's references are more unexpected, more full of surprises, often more playful and carefree. There is the sense that what Basquiat presents results from a mind independent of hierarchical and declarative judgment. In presenting all that he portrayed as being of equal value, Basquiat was a non-judgmental observer who approached his subjects with a certain detachment, without an agenda, a need to separate out, to choose or select.[5]

Rauschenberg's transformation of popular source material into estheticized content was an important inspiration for Basquiat. In Rauschenberg's work, Basquiat found the license to move from the representation of an image, to the placement of a text, the gestural stroke of paint or drawn line. Whether it was in a section of a *Combine* painting such as *Canyon* (1959), or a solvent transfer on paper with gouache, pencil, and watercolor, such as *Currency* (1958), Basquiat found validation for his own developing practice of integrating representational image, text, and non-referential pictorial gesture. Not only was Rauschenberg's integration of figuration and abstraction important for Basquiat, but in the older master's work the young artist also discovered a fluidity of esthetic moves. This became an essential aspect of Basquiat's full pictorial expression. Some of the most complex and integrated examples of Basquiat's synthesis of figure, text and passages of paint were realized in the 1984 series of silkscreened paintings such as *Melting Point of Ice* (1984) (p. 94). This series pays tribute to the pictorial achievements of Robert Rauschenberg in his works utilizing the silkscreen medium.

II. EARLY WORKS

In the artist's drawing oeuvre there are several very different types of important works, and drawing served a number of different functions. Works on paper from 1979 to 1980 include drawings after the artist's fascination with comic books, collaged postcards, and small photo-collaged self portraits. The first fully realized works on paper are the text drawings he executed in notebooks, and on sheets of paper, in 1980–81 (p. 72, 73). These include works consisting of a single word, such as MILK © or AARON accompanied by the artist's iconic three-pointed crown, and drawings with single, in some cases multiple, lines of text. Probably the most recognized of these is the drawing with the text FAMOUS NEGRO ATHLETES. Others include NO MUNDANE OPTIONS, ORIGIN OF COTTON, ALOT OF BOWERY BUMS USED TO BE EXECUTIVES, TARTOWN © and JIMMY BEST ON HIS BACK TO THE SUCKERPUNCH OF HIS CHILDHOOD FILES. The words and texts from these early works on paper are found in both paintings and other works on paper throughout Basquiat's career. It was from these first word/text drawings that he came to recognize the possibility of a word or text carrying the same weight and function as an image. These works were the first expression of Basquiat's unique artistic voice.

Untitled (Grid) (1981) is possibly Jean-Michel Basquiat's first work on paper in which he integrates a number of the images which will define his career. In this early work, Basquiat introduced his visual content in a structured, grid-like form. The mere act of combining symbol, image and text must have signaled to the nineteen-year-old artist the rich possibilities for the future integration of text and imagery.

Stemming from his experience on the streets of Manhattan, Jean-Michel Basquiat, the astute observer, depicts in a

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and spray paint on canvas
86 x 104 inches
218.5 x 264 cm

Untitled, 1981
Acrylic, marker, paper collage, oil paintstick, and crayon on canvas
48 1/2 x 62 inches
123 x 157.5 cm

highly organized manner five automobiles interspersed with nine crowns, two sketchily drawn half figures, a baseball, the word ARASMUS and its palindrome SUMSARA, and a repeated circular form which is divided into sections by crossing lines. In this work, the images are stacked one on top of the other. Each of the images is restricted to its compartment, thus limiting any interaction. Nonetheless, the overall effect is that of myriad actions taking place across a loosely defined space.

Untitled (Grid) may be the first work in which the crown, which became the artist's signature image, takes on a prominent role. Combined with images referring to the people, places and events which he observed, Basquiat saw the possibility of transforming the meaning of his social and cultural references with his newly discovered icon, the crown.

One of the crowns depicted in the work has added importance. Occupying the lower left quadrant is a white crown on a black background. This small distinction from his other early crowns will become important. Within one year Basquiat undertook a wide range of works, including paintings, works on paper, silkscreen editions on paper and canvas, and even a record cover, in which he reversed his imagery and presented white images against a black background. This early drawing was the artist's first implementation of the reversed image. It signaled a new range of pictorial possibilities, as he followed the execution of this work on paper with his reversed eighteen-part silkscreen print *Anatomy*, the cover of his early rap record *Beat Bop*, and the two monumental silkscreen prints on canvas, *Tuxedo* and *Untitled*. In all of these, Basquiat exploited the pictorial as well as social-cultural implications of transforming white into black and black into white.

III. CITYSCAPES

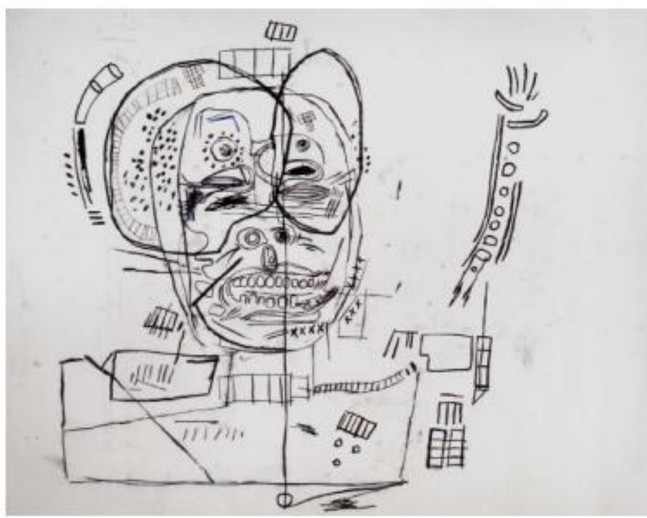
Untitled (Grid) (p.74) is also historically important in its layout of imagery. Basquiat's presentation of his images, especially the repeated depiction of an automobile in a formal, grid-like composition, was his early representation of landscape. From this small, simple work, Jean-Michel Basquiat began an in-depth exploration and representation of the urban environment in a small number of paintings loosely identifiable as cityscapes. The structuring of *Untitled (Grid)* is more compartmentalized, less fluid, and indicative of a language and vocabulary in the process of development.

This early work on paper may be seen as the catalyst for the subsequent cityscapes.

The 1981 cityscape paintings include *Untitled* (1981) (p.75), *Untitled* (1980–81), *Untitled* (1981), and *Untitled* (1981) (p.76). Preceding any of his larger narrative paintings with the inclusion of a full-length figure, the cityscape paintings were Basquiat's first large scale works. His earlier artistic practice as a tagger on the streets of New York City informed them: each executed in acrylic and spray paint on canvas. The cityscapes were the initiative for an evolved urban iconography incorporating both figure and landscape. The earliest and smallest of these, made in late 1980 or early 1981, depicts a row of multistory buildings with a small red automobile passing by. This same view is in a later and larger work, now with an airplane flying in and out of similar urban structures. In a third work, the most complex, Basquiat includes, along with an airplane and a section of a city street as viewed from overhead, his signature crown and an "S" inside the linear outline of two buildings.

IV. *UNTITLED* (1981)

Untitled (1981) (p.77) is one of the earliest paintings in the artist's oeuvre with a richly diversified assembly of figurative characters. Executed in acrylic, magic marker, oil paintstick and paper collage, and completed only a short time after having introduced his cityscape imagery, *Untitled* represents Jean-Michel Basquiat's full expression



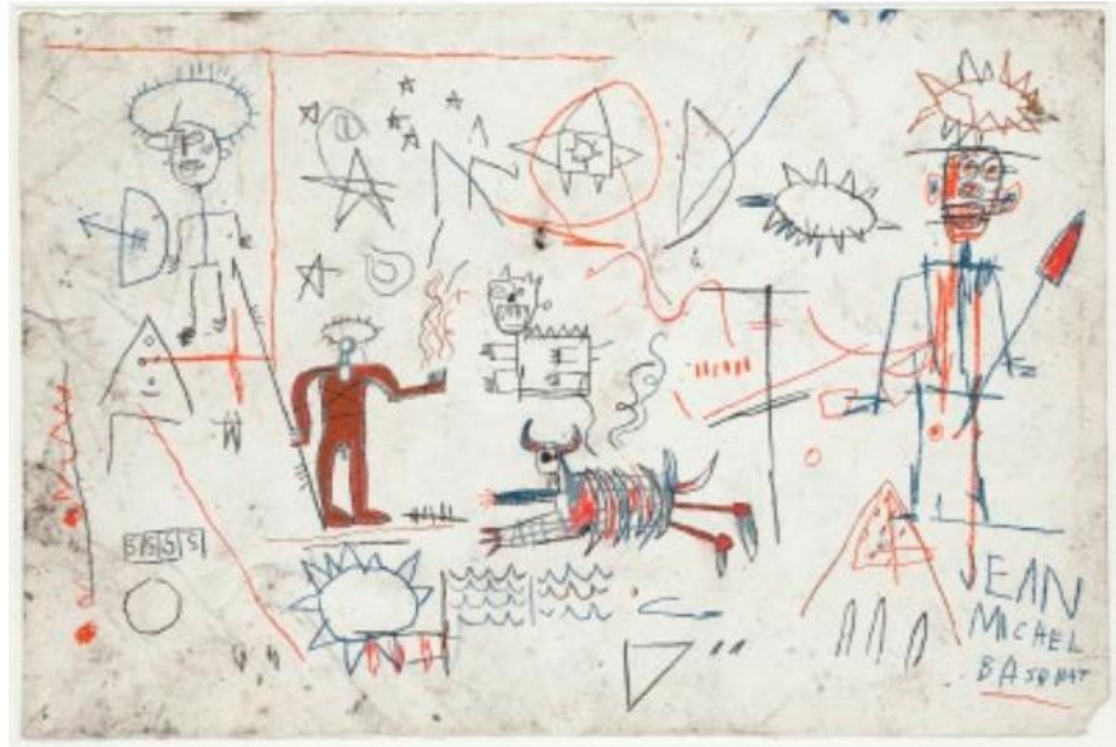
of his vision. Basquiat portrays nine personages, an equal array of full length figures and heads. These figures are presented as players of a game of skelly on a street in New York City.[7]

Reference to this specific environment is also suggested in the work's loose grid structure. Recalling the cityscape paintings, *Untitled* (1981) incorporates figures in the urban milieu. Basquiat's portrayal of figures interacting within a dynamically functioning arena is made credible by the way in which he built up his pictorial surface. *Untitled* is one of the first and finest examples of the artist's integration of drawing and paper collage. In this work, Basquiat began by laying down a number of original drawings over which he applied colorful acrylic brushwork. The inclusion of paper collage, his new means of integrating drawing with the medium of painting, resulted in a dynamic interaction of the drawn figure and luminous passages of color. This pictorial solution enabled Basquiat to create a dense, multidimensional surface, convincingly capturing the complexity as well as the frenzy of the bustling streets of Manhattan.

Figural representation, and eventually portraiture, would increasingly occupy a larger place in Basquiat's pictorial output. The 1981 painting *Untitled* is the artist's first multi-figural representation of the young black male. In this painting, Basquiat's figures do not yet convey authority, soon to become the distinguishing feature of his figurative imagery. While *Profit I* (1982) or *Self Portrait* (1982) announced the arrival of the subject of the liberated young black male, these first iconic figures were critical to its evolution. The gestures captured in two of Basquiat's figures, and the crown over one head, indicate strength and independence. The smallest, all-black standing figure with forearms pointing down, has a nimbus positioned directly over his head. This symbol alludes to neither king nor divinity, but to liberation. In the months following the execution of *Untitled* the iconography of this small figure would take on increasing prominence, defining many of Basquiat's key works.

V. *UNTITLED* (1982)

Concurrent with the cityscape paintings and the introduction of collage into his painting practice, Basquiat began to produce larger works on paper. These included works with a full-length figure, and one larger work on paper with multiple figures in a loosely defined landscape. In works such as *Untitled* (1982) (p.68) and *Untitled* (1982) (p.87), the head becomes larger, facial features more defined, and color and gesture are more prominent. As important stages in the artist's maturation, these larger figural drawings



Opposite, top to bottom
PABLO PICASSO
La Femme qui pleure (Weeping Woman), 1937
Etching, aquatint and drypoint on paper
30 1/2 x 22 3/8 inches
77.5 x 56.8 cm

YORUBA CULTURE
Mask, Nigeria
Wood
Height: 9 7/8 inches, 25 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick and graphite on paper
22 1/2 x 28 1/2 inches
57.2 x 72.4 cm

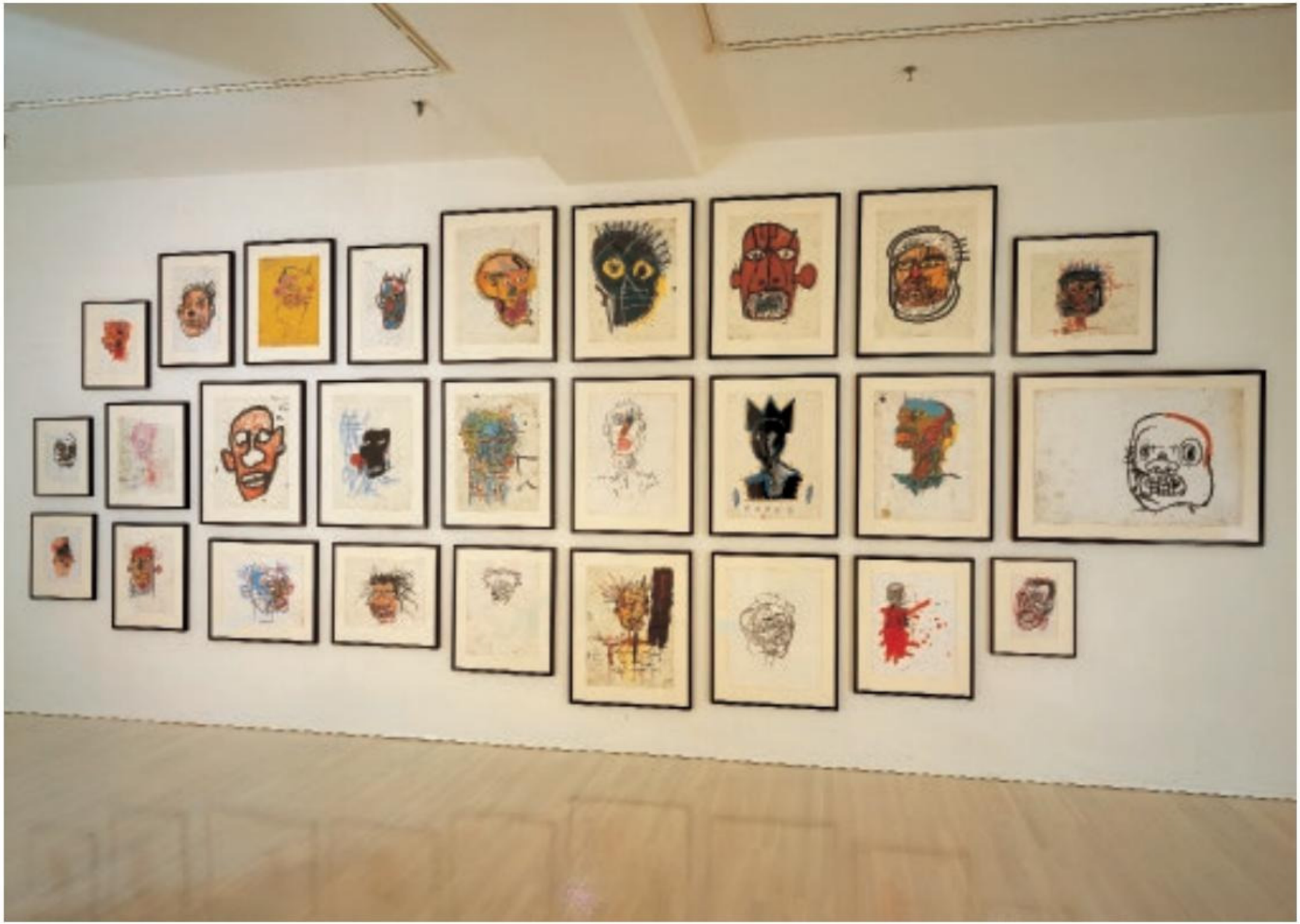
Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
40 x 60 inches
101.5 x 152.5 cm

reveal an artistic voice about to break out. Unlike these early 1982 single figure drawings, *Untitled* (1981) (p.79) is the first important work in which full length figures are active participants in a narrative context. Basquiat must have recognized the importance of this 40 x 60 inches work on paper, as he kept it in his own collection.[8] This seminal work depicts three full-length standing figures, each with a nimbus hovering overhead and surrounded by an array of elements such as stars, arrows, suns, spaceship, and water. In the center, halfway between two of the figures, are two four-legged creatures, each lying in an extended prone position with head turned facing out toward the viewer. Clearly there is an implied relationship between Basquiat's figures, two of which are holding spheres, the third has a bow and arrow, and these two reclining creatures. While interpreting this work is problematic, it is notable as the first example of Basquiat's intent to create a multiple figural composition with a complex iconography. It is the precursor to *Acque Pericolose*, Basquiat's first fully accomplished narrative painting on canvas.

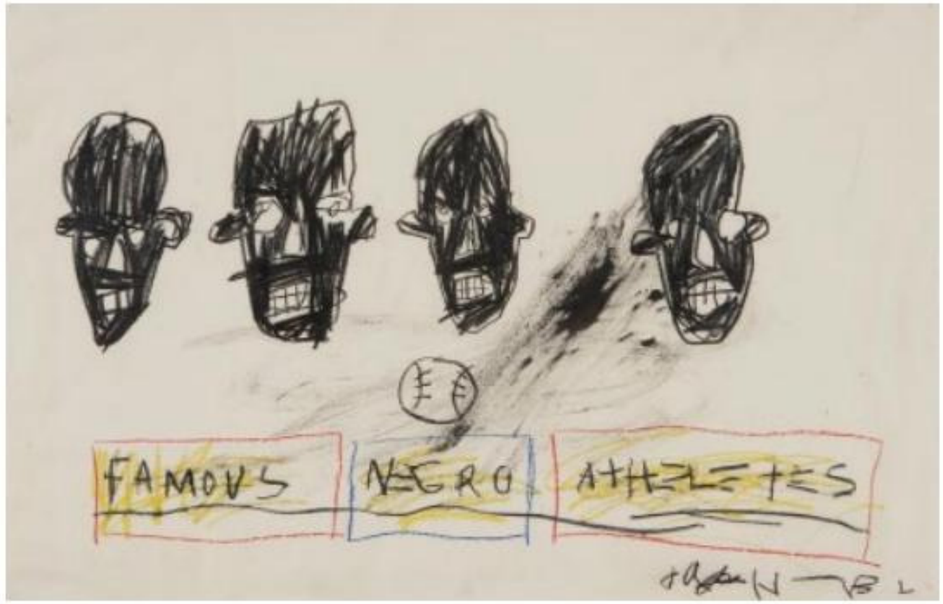
VI. HEADS

At the outset of 1982, Jean-Michel Basquiat created unique and haunting images of the male head. Most of these works on paper were relatively small in scale. With a few exceptions, each presents a head floating on the white background of the paper. While they share the characteristics of large, bulging eyes, open mouth and often short, spiky hair, each image is distinct and individual. These figures are unsettling, leaving the viewer with the feeling that they exist in another realm. Peering out into our space, they are oracles conveying a message from another dimension. For some, Basquiat's heads read more as masks, not the features of living human beings. The facial features have been rendered in a reductive, stylized way, reminiscent of Picasso's cubist style.

We might shift our attention for a moment from the artist's emotive and colorful heads and consider one entirely black and white head study, *Untitled* (1982) (p.78). This work



BETH PHILLIPS
"Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawings,"
Robert Miller Gallery, New York, 1990



is one of Basquiat's most intense forays into the abstract, reductive language of Picasso. This entirely line-drawn work also suggests the artist's incorporation of sub-Saharan African sculpture elements into his evolving pictorial vocabulary. The work's specific focus on both Picasso and African sculpture separates it from the other head images produced at this same time. Notably, Basquiat's black and white drawing presents a multiplicity of views of a single head. While the artist presents both eyes and mouth frontally, the cranium is viewed from the side. In this work, Basquiat's concern is the simultaneous depiction of exterior and interior realms. While the drawing portrays the projecting facial features of eyes, nose, and mouth, it also alludes to a much less obvious interior dimension.

The work, which finds only a few other comparable examples in Basquiat's oeuvre of works on paper, brings to mind two key paintings: the first, *Untitled* (1981) (p.115) executed at the same time as the black and white drawing, and *La Colomba* (1983) (p.124), executed approximately eighteen months later. The subject of all three works is an external physiognomic presence existing alongside a vitally functioning interior life. This would become a central theme for Basquiat. The artist continually returned to the theme of a duality underlying our existence in works rendered solely in black and white, such as Tuxedo, in which the artist reversed the original content of the work, turning original black line drawings on a white ground into white images on a black ground; in the simple rendering of the scales of justice accompanied by the text GOD AND LAW; and in the "x-raying" of a figure to reveal the physicality of the body juxtaposed with a subtler interior of nerves and cognitive sensors.

Returning to Basquiat's production of highly expressive, colorful head images in 1982, what drew the artist almost obsessively to the depiction of the human head was his fascination with the face as a passageway from exterior physical presence into the hidden realities of man's psychological and mental realms. The eye and mouth, two of the gateways enabling a way inside, are depicted as both large and open. In the case of the eyes, they not only peer out as if seeing, but also invite the viewer to come within. Basquiat's depiction of the mouth not only implies an externalizing of expression—an outpouring of words and thoughts—but also the consumption of forces and energies drawn from an external source. While these heads hardly appear to represent "real" people whom we have encountered in our daily lives, their expressions and articulated emotive content show Basquiat's fascination with our psychological as well as spiritual dispositions. As conveyed in these works, Basquiat perceived basic psychological states to be primarily an expression of energy. It is the underlying theme of these works that draws the viewer to them. Basquiat's head drawings from 1982 are a portrait gallery documenting the artist's observations of the psychological make up of people he encountered in his daily life. Though these images might not reflect our experience of people

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Famous Negro Athletes, 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
22 7/8 x 35 inches
58 x 89 cm

Six Crimee, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on masonite
Triptych: 72 x 144 inches
183 x 366 cm

who have crossed our paths, because of their individuation, Basquiat's heads feel both real and accessible. Expressing the artist's astute observation of diverse psycho-spiritual states of being, they are the direct result of the days and hours Basquiat spent on the street, observing and exploring. Having moved from the street to the studio, Basquiat turned to these images as his way of conveying to his new audience what he had witnessed and learned. While it remains unclear whether any of Basquiat's images of heads from this formative moment are a specific individual, I propose that each resulted from the artist reflecting upon a specific experience. Something more involved than an artist desiring to portray the physical features of an assortment of individuals caused each image to come forth.

At the time of Basquiat's death, he owned no fewer than twenty-seven of the head studies he executed in 1982, testament to their importance to him. These twenty-seven works on paper, each portraying a different person, were shown in the artist's first posthumous exhibition, "Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawings," at the Robert Miller Gallery in November 1990. All of the works included in this exhibition were consigned to the gallery by the estate of the artist. Basquiat kept this group of images for several reasons. One head image on paper, *Untitled (Bust)* (1984) (p.96) was turned into a silkscreen image and used in each of the twelve silkscreen paintings which have come to be known as the *Blue Ribbon Paintings*. That Basquiat kept a great number of his head images is also accounted for by the fact that most of his early collectors were primarily focused on acquiring paintings, so the head drawings remained in the artist's possession. I would also propose that Basquiat held onto them in order to stay close to his sources, to maintain a connection with the milieu from which he constantly drew his artistic energy and motivation.

In the 1990 exhibition, "Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawings," the head images were all presented on one long wall, reflecting the curator's astute understanding that this group of works were Basquiat's "portrait gallery." That Basquiat also thought of his diverse head studies as forming a portrait gallery is obvious in the multi-panel painting *Six Crimee* executed at the same time as the 1982 head drawings. The painting presents six heads—each shown fully frontal, eyes and mouths wide open—gazing directly out at the

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Mitchell Crew, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and photocopy collage mounted
on wood supports with chain
Triptych: 71 1/2 x 137 3/4 inches
181.5 x 350 cm

viewer. While none of the heads depicted in this work can be identified as portraying a specific person, the rendering of each figure's hair as well as their dark skin coloration leaves the viewer with the feeling of being positioned in front of members of the artist's "crew." As presented here, Basquiat's associates are removed from the realm of earthly existence. With a radiating nimbus above each individual's head, these immortal souls have transcended the capacities of functioning beings.

With the one exception of *Untitled (Bust)* (1984), Basquiat did not use any of his head images on paper as the specific source for a subsequent painting on canvas. Nonetheless, an individualized and highly emotive head does become the subject for a number of paintings on canvas created between 1982 and 1984. Paintings as diverse as *The Philistines*, *The Ruffians*, *Untitled (Ernok)*, *Cabezza*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*, *Notary*, *Palm Springs Jump*, *Banker*, and *Self Portrait as a Heel* and even the highly personal portrait of the artist and his colleagues, *Hollywood Africans*, all find their source in Basquiat's raw, simply rendered images of heads on paper. The full expression of this subject is realized in the painting, *Mitchell Crew* (1983) (p. 84-85). In this multi-panel masterwork, Basquiat transforms his initial interest in the individual head into a complete portrait gallery, presenting nine distinct heads, many sharing facial features with the early discrete head studies on paper. The "Mitchell Crew," as the phrase repeated two times in the work states, were members of the artist's hall of fame.

Two larger 1982 head images on paper are important to note. What distinguishes these two works is not simply their larger size (43 x 31 inches and 63 x 44 inches) (p. 68), but their proximity to the attributes of a fully functioning human being. The depiction of facial features places each figure closer to the representation of a person. In both works, human likeness is enhanced by the artist's inclusion of the neck-torso region. It is the rendering of the hair, however, that is possibly most revealing.

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
The Philistines, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
72 x 123 inches
183 x 312.5 cm

Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper mounted on canvas
43 x 31 inches
109 x 78 cm

Sometimes artistic moves are big and bold, other times subtle, even barely perceptible. In the case of Basquiat's 1982 head images, a more realistic rendering of the hair in these two larger drawings represents a key shift in the artist's focus. In many of the smaller head images, there is no hair. In others, hair is rendered with a few short, spiky strokes of black oil paintstick. In none of the smaller head images is the artist's rendering of hair consistent with physiognomic likeness. In these works, hair is stylized rather than lifelike. In contrast, in both of the two larger head images, the rendering of the figures' hair conveys individuality, and the ethnic background of each, clearly African or African American.

It is noteworthy that one of the two works has been referred to as *Untitled "(Head of a Madman)."* When this work was sold at auction in 2013, the auction catalogue text went to great lengths in attempting to establish the title of this work.[9] While effective for marketing, it is important to recognize that Basquiat did not title it.[10] While assigning the specific attribute of "madness" to this work remains problematic, it does support the point that Basquiat was concerned with the representation of an individual's identity, in this case his psycho-emotional state of being.

I think it is reasonable to speculate that in these two works on paper we see two of the earliest examples of the artist's interest in not merely portraiture, but more specifically self portraiture. This conclusion is suggested by the relationship of these two larger head drawings to the imagery in several paintings on canvas, produced either at the same time or shortly after. Several paintings exhibit similar facial features and hairstyle.[11] In addition to the two works on paper, some of the most important self portrait images on canvas include *Dos Cabezas* (1982), the double portrait of the artist and Andy Warhol (p. 194); *Untitled* (1982); *Self Portrait* (1982) (p.141), the monumental, full length image of the artist holding an arrow in his left hand set against a cityscape;[12] *Self Portrait as a Heel, Part Two* (1982), *Self Portrait as a Heel* (1982), *Hollywood Africans* (1982); and *Untitled* (1983) (p. 34), the large work on paper laid down on canvas with a head surrounded by words and texts. This group of self portraits should also include the overly life sized image of a frightened black male depicted in *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump* (1982) (p.63). What clearly links all these images and supports the conclusion that each represents a self portrait is their representation of a black male figure of undetermined age with long, black dreadlocks. While none of these images looks precisely like the artist, each captures the artist's most distinguishable feature from this time. A comparison of the heads represented in any of these works with any of the recognized photographs of the artist from this moment makes this conclusion more or less certain.[13]

THE PHILISTINES

While self portraiture is one of the results of the artist's focus on the representation of the human head in his 1982 works on paper, another is one of Basquiat's most compelling paintings, *The Philistines*. The work presents three figures, two of which are rendered as a head and half torso, the third just head and neck. Like earlier works, the eyes are large and bulging, the mouths open. The eyes of *The Philistines* hold a relentless gaze, inviting the viewer to peer into the figure's internal life. The chest cavity of the middle figure has fully exposed ribs and spine, revealing the pathway for physical sensation, cognitive receptivity and the flow of subtle energies. With the intent of establishing even more direct viewer involvement, Basquiat has positioned his characters in the extreme foreground,

behind which vibrant, colorful brush and paintstick strokes thrust forward, in some cases permeating their physicality. The space surrounding and engulfing Basquiat's figures is as alive and energetic as the figures themselves.

Basquiat presents his Philistines as formidable foes. They are smug, possibly ignorant and indifferent, clearly antagonistic. He presents them as a strong, authoritative force that must be engaged and reckoned with. While these figures are confrontational, even frightening, the energy that they exude is irresistible. Simply, we want to be part of it. Who are the Philistines? Even though these figures present strong psycho-physical attributes, they are not the bearers of destruction. They are presented as a manifestation of the psychological forces that one must encounter and endure in the pursuit of a truer sense of self.

VII. FIVE DEFINING FIGURE DRAWINGS

Midway through 1982, Jean-Michel Basquiat executed five works on paper that today must be considered a highlight in his career. For a work on paper, each is notably large, measuring 60 x 40 inches. Four of the five depict a single standing figure, the fifth a standing male-female couple (p. 161). The intensity and frenetic energy conveyed in each of these masterworks was not sustainable. Collectors Herbert and Lenore Schorr reflected on this in a discussion about their acquisition of one of the five works, saying that Basquiat told them that he would never again attempt a similar kind of drawing.[14] That Basquiat recognized the importance of these works is supported by the fact that at the time of his death, two of the five were in his personal collection.[15]

What distinguishes these five works is the artist's rendering of his subject. The presentation of a single standing figure floating against a background, in itself would hardly set these five works apart. Rather it is the means used by the artist to create each figure which is distinctive. Each figure results from the repeated attack of linear strokes made with colored oil paintsticks. In three of the five works these strokes are repeated in a somewhat evenly spaced linear pattern. In one, the figure is built up with a layering of linear and circular strokes, with no obvious strategy for placement. While the strokes used to create these figures are varied, in each of the five works the artist's marks result in a highly compact form. In both variety and repetition, the strokes give each figure qualities not normally associated with human beings. Laden with corporeal density, these figures nevertheless seem weightless, rising up before the viewer.

These impressions are enhanced by Basquiat's treatment of the space surrounding each figure. Similar strokes of oil paintstick are also used to render the background of these compelling figure drawings. He surrounded each figure with an array of words, symbols, and images, many of which are repeated over and over again, creating a highly energized space.

The specific figural presence conveyed in each of these five works on paper distinguishes them not only in the artist's oeuvre but also in all of twentieth-century art. What is truly remarkable is the artist's ability to confidently create a frenzied picture, without its appearing overdone or confused.

The central figure in each of these five works is mesmerizing. Are these figures the source or receiver of the energy depicted? In two of the five works there appears to be equilibrium between figure and background. The same excitement and agitation engulfing Basquiat's figure pulsates from the elements surrounding it. The positioning of the arms and hands in these particular examples expresses a source of energy, active rather than passive.

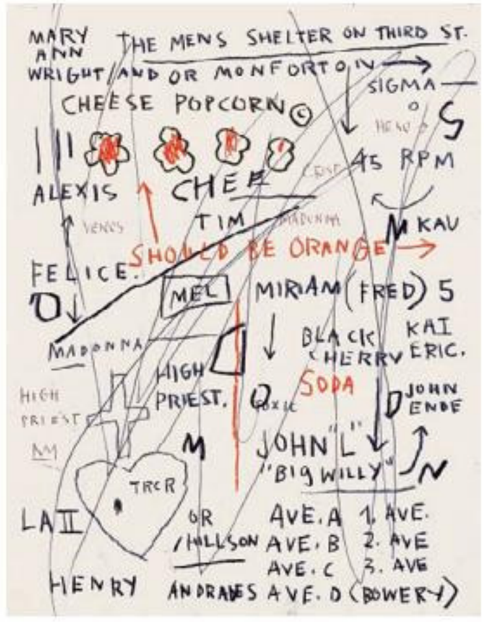
Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
30 x 22 inches
76 x 56 cm

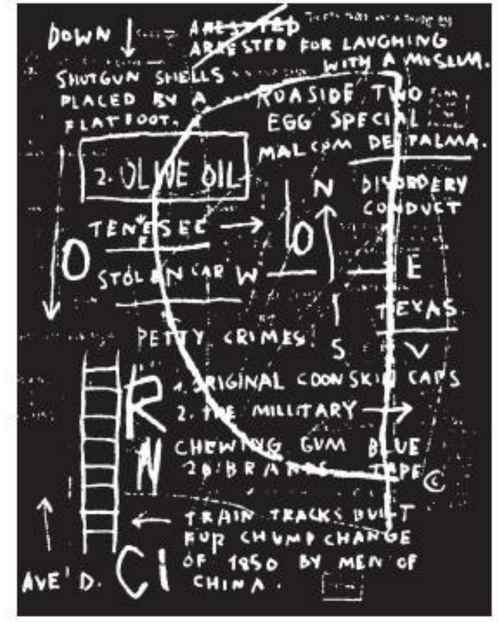
Opposite, left to right, top to bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm

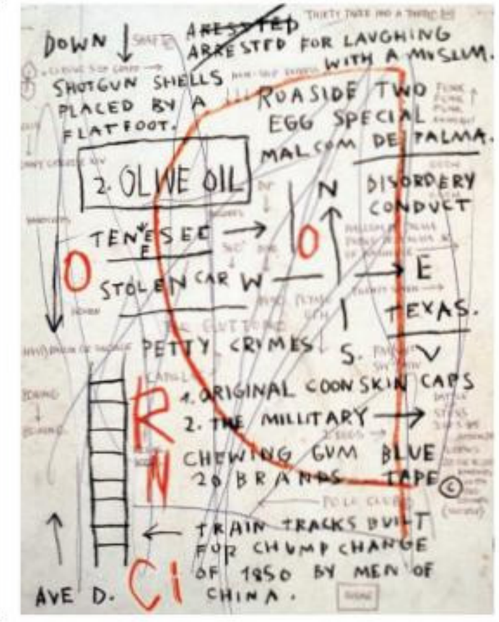
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm

Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm

Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm







It is energy which is the underlying subject of these works, and which draws the viewer to them. The figure blends seamlessly with the picture ground. I suggest that these works reveal Basquiat's newfound recognition of how his life was guided by an undefined source of energy. While these figures seem connected to the physical realm, they equally recognize something more ephemeral. They feel suspended between competing realities, partially grounded to the earth while channeling the power of something subtler.

VIII. WORKS IN SILKSCREEN

TUXEDO

In November 1982, Larry Gagosian asked if I would like to meet with Jean-Michel Basquiat to discuss the production of a silkscreen print edition that the artist desired to create. As previously noted, at this time Jean-Michel had just begun his residency in the dealer's Venice house (where the bottom floor functioned as a separate residence with a full gallery space). When I met with Jean-Michel, he laid out on the floor of his new Venice studio a group of sixteen works on paper in a very specific configuration. Fifteen of the sixteen sheets of paper contained a combination of words, texts, and images executed in oil paintstick and ballpoint pen ink. The sixteenth was composed of a series of texts and images executed in ballpoint pen on eleven small pieces of paper that had been laid down on a sheet of paper on top of which the artist painted a large black crown in acrylic paint.[16] It was Basquiat's intent to have the entire group of sixteen works on paper photographically transferred into silkscreen and presented on canvas. In this process, Basquiat chose to reverse each image so that in the final silkscreen texts and images would appear as white against a screened black background. The artist, working with my newly formed enterprise, New City Editions in Venice, California, produced the work over several months according to his vision, and presented it in March 1983 as part of his exhibition at the Larry Gagosian Gallery in West Hollywood. Basquiat titled this work *Tuxedo* (p. 170).[17]

Tuxedo represented an important milestone in Basquiat's experimentation with new and different ways to integrate drawing into his picture-making. While collaging an original drawing onto the canvas picture support was the quickest and most spontaneous method, by 1982 Basquiat recognized that he simply could not produce enough new works on paper for all the paintings he intended to produce. In addition, at this time Basquiat became increasingly interested in repeating both texts and images in the same work of art and using the same text and/or image from one painting to another. With this recognition, Basquiat began to reproduce his drawings in photocopies. Paintings in which the artist collaged original drawings onto a canvas picture support, all dating from 1982, include *Leonardo's Greatest Hits, Jesse, Jawbone of an Ass, Piscine Versus the Best Hotels, Price of Gasoline in the Third World, Baby Boom, St Louis Joe Surrounded by Snakes, Santo 2, A Panel of Experts, Phooey, Untitled (Crown Hotel)* and *Future Sciences Versus the Man.* Later in the same year, Basquiat had moved on from collaging original drawings onto canvas, and began using photocopied images instead. This practice became the artist's means of developing the background for the multi-panel paintings he produced beginning in 1982. These include *La Colomba, Mitchell Crew, Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savanarola, Frogman, Brother's Sausage*, and *Grillo.*

The extent to which Basquiat would re-use an image from a work on paper by photocopying is revealed in the drawing *Untitled (All Stars)*, (1983). Prior to this work

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Tuxedo (detail), 1982
Silkscreen on canvas
102 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches
260.8 x 151.8 cm

Untitled (Cheese Popcorn), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches
49 x 38.7 cm

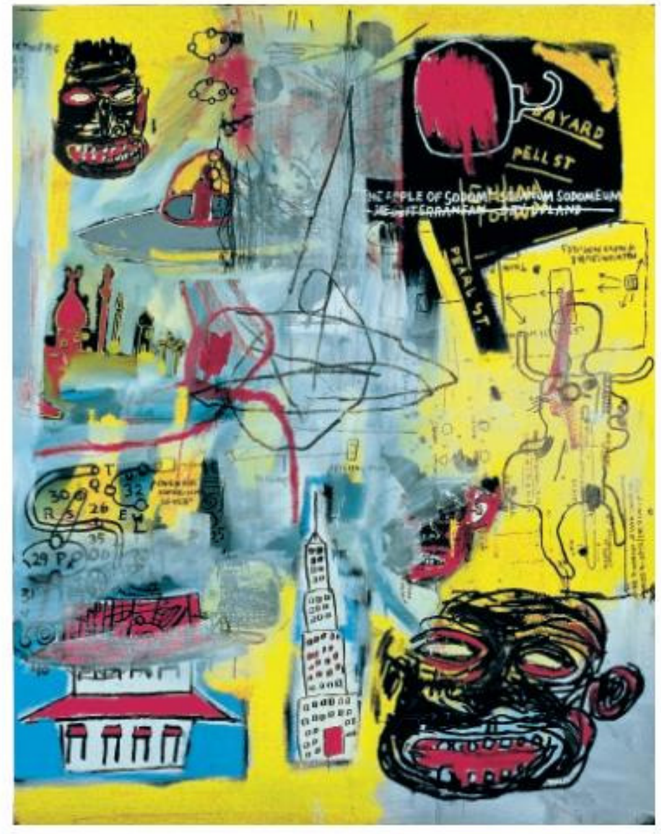
From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Tuxedo (detail), 1982
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
102 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches
260.8 x 151.8 cm

Untitled (Olive Oil), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 3/8 inches
49 x 39 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
88 x 77 inches
223.5 x 195.5 cm

leaving the artist's possession, he made a photocopy of both the entire work and portions of the original drawing. The entire drawing reappears in photocopy in the painting *Pink Amos or Andy* dating from the same year. Parts of the original drawing appear in three other paintings, including *Toxic* (1984), *Galileo Galilei* (1983), and *Red Joy* (1984). Another example of the same practice is the image of Charlie Parker in *Untitled (Charlie Parker)* (1983), which reappears three times in photocopy collage in the painting *Joy*, 1984. The word DUMARIS along with a circular symbol first appearing in *Untitled (King Alphonso XIII)* (1983), also appears in the same 1984 painting *Joy*. All of these are examples of Basquiat selecting an image/text from certain works on paper, making multiple photocopies, and saving them for future use. In SoHo in 1982 to 1983, one often ran across Basquiat or his assistant at the photo service bureau in the Louis Sullivan building on the corner of Bleecker and Crosby streets where the artist made regular use of their photocopy machine.

Tuxedo, in which original drawings were photographically turned into a silkscreen image, was the next step in the artist's attempt to extend the life of his original drawings. *Tuxedo* was a revelation. Immediately following the production of *Tuxedo* Basquiat undertook the production of a second work originating from a group of twenty-eight original works on paper, which were again transformed into a silkscreen on canvas edition.[18]



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Lead Plate with Hole, 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
86 x 68 inches
218.5 x 172.5 cm

From his success with *Tuxedo* and the second silkscreen on canvas, *Untitled* (p. 32), Basquiat recognized that he could go one step further in the use of his drawings for the production of paintings. In early 1984, after Basquiat had moved into his own studio space on Market Street in Venice, one of the projects he began was an ambitious series of large, silkscreened paintings that originated from drawings. Here again, with the assistance of New City Editions, Basquiat turned drawings into silkscreen images, which with the artist's direction, were screened directly onto canvas. Works from this series include *Sienna*, *Melting Point of Ice*, *Cathode*, *Logo*, and *Lead Plate with Pole*. While each of these works has unique imagery, composition, and subject matter, the artist often utilized one or more of the same silkscreened images in multiple works in the series. In the building up of the images included in this group of works, there was no order or pattern. In some, the artist used silkscreen images to build up the background over which he painted. In others, the backgrounds were generated by the layering of broad areas of a single color over which images were screened. These paintings, with their rich and complex layers of painted and screened imagery were different from the other paintings Basquiat produced at this time. In some of them there are as many as five layers of paint and screened images. In certain examples, such as *Untitled*, the picture surface reads as the harmonization of screened and painted images moving toward the viewer countered by brushwork and partially revealed screened images in the background. This work, as well as *Sienna* and *Cathode*, examples of expressionistic imagery countered by strong, primary colors, also reflect a pop sensibility. In *Melting Point of Ice*, in which three quadrants of the picture surface present reversed black and white screened images, the artist harkens back to the pictorial effect achieved in his two silkscreens on canvas, *Tuxedo* and *Untitled*. All the 1984 silkscreened paintings pay tribute to the achievements of Robert Rauschenberg in his works utilizing the silkscreen medium. Interestingly, Basquiat made the acquaintance of Robert Rauschenberg precisely at this time. One night while Basquiat was producing this series of paintings, the younger artist visited the senior painter who was then working at Gemini GEL in Los Angeles.[19]

THE *BLUE RIBBON PAINTINGS*

That the silkscreen medium was an important aspect of Basquiat's pictorial practice is exemplified by the twelve paintings he executed upon his return to his New York studio in June 1984. Known as the *Blue Ribbon Paintings*, these works were executed in the same manner as the Venice paintings. In contrast to the Venice pictures, each of these works (pp. 96-97) presents the repeated image of a single black head with crown overhead. The *Blue Ribbon Paintings* are less about the process of making a picture and more focused on presenting a mysterious and haunting personal vision. The imagery depicted in the first screened paintings is strong and memorable. These works were primarily driven by the artist's effort to make dynamic, active pictorial surfaces filled with subtle passages of paint and rich surface effects. The *Blue Ribbon Paintings* reflect a cooler, more serene, even conceptual sensibility.

Shortly after Basquiat's return to New York in the second half of 1984 he began his collaborative work with Andy Warhol, an undertaking that would occupy a good portion

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Melting Point of Ice, 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
86 x 68 inches
218.5 x 172.5 cm

Untitled (Bust), 1984
Acrylic, paper, and tape collage on paper
30 1/8 x 22 5/8 inches
76.2 x 57 cm

of his creative time over the next year. In the collaborative paintings Basquiat and Warhol produced in 1984 and 1985, most of the images the younger artist contributed were generated by the very same process he had employed in Venice, turning original drawings into silkscreen images.

Returning to Basquiat's original drawings used in the creation of *Tuxedo*, several observations are relevant. The artist chose to reproduce the drawings not as he created them, but to reverse them so that the drawn image/text on the white paper ground appeared as white image/text on black. This process became Basquiat's means of transforming the meaning of a given subject. Much like a sorcerer seeks to turn lead into gold, the young artist, through the "magic" of photography and printing, sought to radically transform the content and meaning of image and text. By reversing the information conveyed in these drawings, Basquiat demonstrated to both himself and the world that he possessed the capacity, through one simple act, to turn a world dominated by white into one where black dominates.

The esthetic implications of the *Tuxedo* drawings are also noteworthy. These drawings show an artist's capacity to generate a picture while primarily relying on text rather than imagery. While text clearly prevails as the primary content of these works, it is the integration of text and imagery that compels the viewer to accept text as being more than literature or writing. Basquiat invites the viewer to abandon assumptions about what a text might mean. Unconsciously, we transform Basquiat's writing into a visual experience. This is especially enhanced by the artist's practice in these works of creating an extremely tight integration of words, phrases, lists, facts, and surrounding images. There is little separation between image and text. No matter how long we stare, it remains unclear where one ends and the other begins. In addition, while we know we have read a specific portion of a given drawing, we still feel as though we are seeing it for the first time.

Because of how Basquiat integrated text and image, these drawings essentially apply and extend one of the basic tenets of modernist picture making. Like Pollock's subtly articulated skins or webs of paint strokes and gestures, the information presented in the drawings for *Tuxedo* does not exist separately from the picture surface. Because Basquiat has blurred the distinction between word (text) and image, the overall pictorial content presented in these drawings is closely linked to the traditional function of text. Basquiat's text and images hug the foreground, existing in our world. While modern artists spanning the era from Monet to Pollock moved away from representation as they sought to reduce illusion in their pictures, Basquiat found the means to achieve a similar end result while at the same time asserting the primacy of references to both present and past experience.

The drawings for *Tuxedo* raise other considerations. Basquiat's practice of repeating the same word or phrase in a drawing enhances viewer involvement. The repetition of a word or phrase keeps the mind in the here and now,

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled
(from the series of eleven *Blue Ribbon Paintings*), 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm

and from getting lost "within" the work. In addition, there are examples of text/images presented as part of a list. A list implies an action, a responsibility, something which needs to be done. When a list is part of a picture, it does not have the same meaning. While Basquiat's lists are false signifiers, they nonetheless cause the viewer, even if only for a moment, to believe in the real time nature of his or her experience. In the artist's late masterwork, *Pegasus*, repetition and list-like text/image making reaches its fullest expression.

In the *Tuxedo* drawings Basquiat introduces the concept of navigation into his picture making. In several of the fifteen individual works on paper, which together were turned into *Tuxedo*, the artist included the image of a ladder. Associated with this is the physical process of movement. Whether up or down, the image suggests both a route and a direction. In other drawings from the group, the artist adds an upward pointing arrow, here again implying directionality. The iconography of ascension will be elaborated on in the discussion of Basquiat's last art works, later on in this volume. The directionality implied in both ladder and arrow again unconsciously connects the viewer to the present, to real time. Basquiat returned to the ladder and upward pointing arrow in key late works, notably in *Eroica I* and *Eroica II*, and in *Pegasus*. The discoveries achieved initially in the *Tuxedo* drawings would be mined by Basquiat at the end of his short-lived career.

IX. *THE DAROS SUITE*

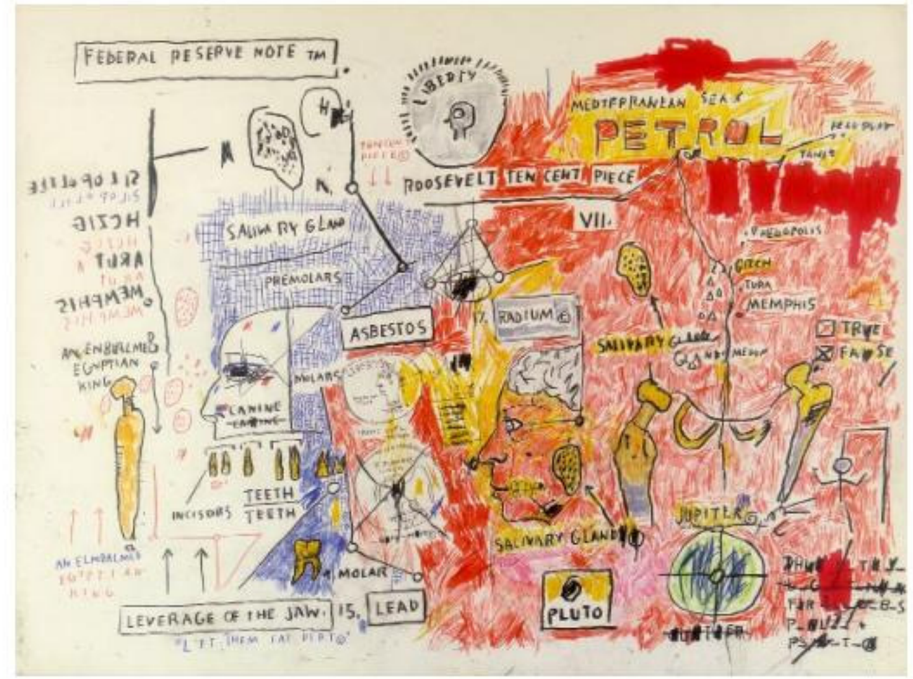
Contemporaneous with the production of *Tuxedo*, Jean-Michel Basquiat created thirty-two works on paper, each 22 1/2 x 30 inches (pp.99-101). Conceived and executed as

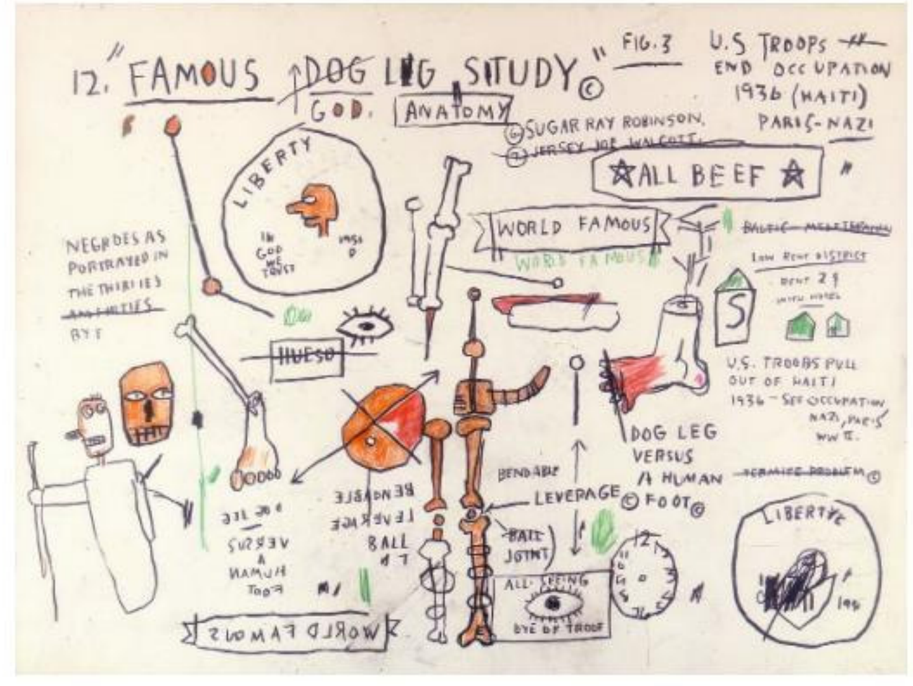
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled
(from the series of eleven *Blue Ribbon Paintings*), 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm

a suite to be exhibited and kept together, they have become known as *The Daros Suite*. As a collection of artworks, they are one of the highlights of Basquiat's oeuvre.

The initial exhibition of *The Daros Suite* (not known by this designation until after their exhibition) was at the Bruno Bischofberger Gallery in Zurich, September 24–October 22, 1983. The catalogue produced after the exhibition states that the works were created "in New York and during several travels in various countries in Winter 1982–83;"[20] and as articulated in the catalogue, each one has a title. This is noteworthy, because these are some of the only works on paper produced by Jean-Michel Basquiat which were actually titled by the artist.[21] The entire group of thirty-two works was acquired by legendary dealer Thomas Amman, who in turn sold them to his primary client, founder of the Daros Collection, thus accounting for the series' titling.

Like Basquiat's most distinguished paintings from 1983, many of the works of *The Daros Suite* are complex. Several works include textural references to European, Christian, and Greco-Roman history and culture. For the first time in the oeuvre we find the words PLOTINUS, TIBERIUS, BRUTUS, PLATO, HOMER, SOCRATES, PERICLES, and ALEXANDER THE GREAT. Others present abstract or conceptual references to states of change and transformation, especially alluding to power, loss, and depletion. Several, consistent with the works on canvas from this same time, refer to human anatomy, including bones, teeth, organs, as well as neurological and biological conditions. Besides the absence of references to the artist's own personal history, this group contains very few references to popular culture. One exception is Basquiat's portrayal of the historical blues musician Robert Johnson in *The Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta*. Here again, Basquiat introduces in *The*



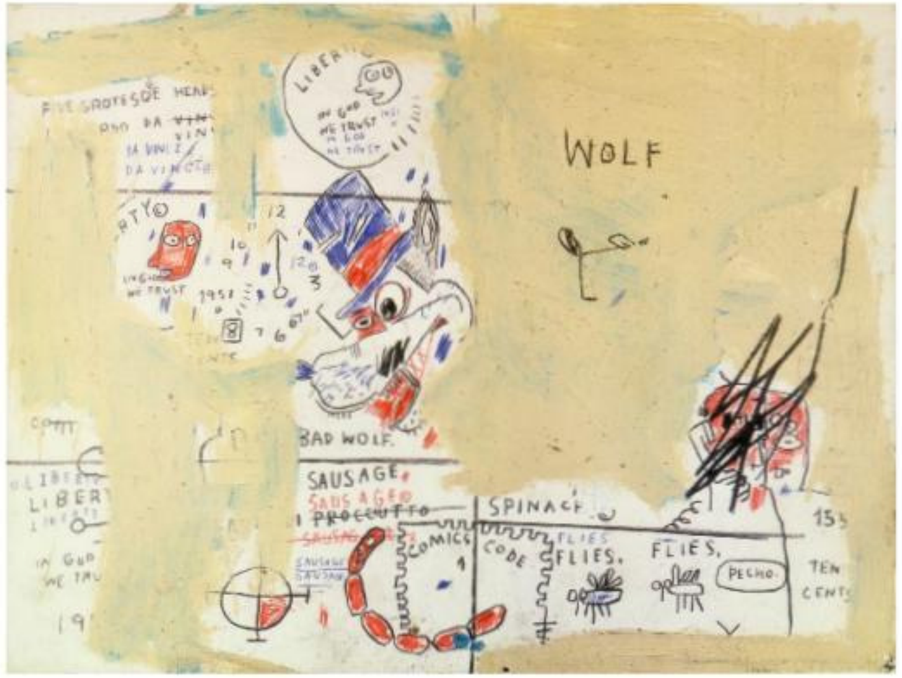


JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
PPCD, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm

From *The Daros Suite*
Snakeman, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm

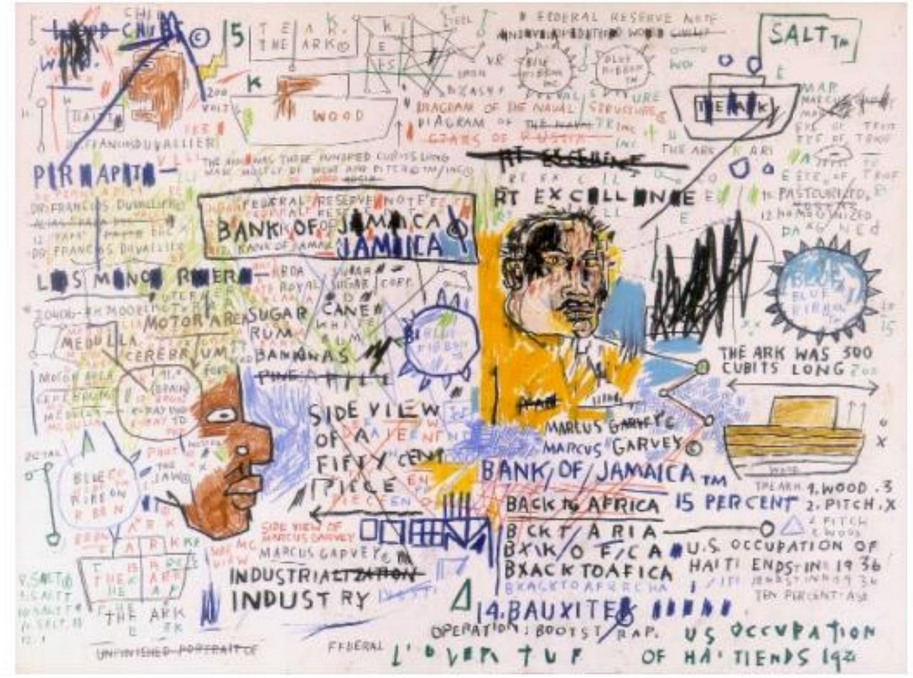
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Liberty, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm

From *The Daros Suite*
Dog Leg Study, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm



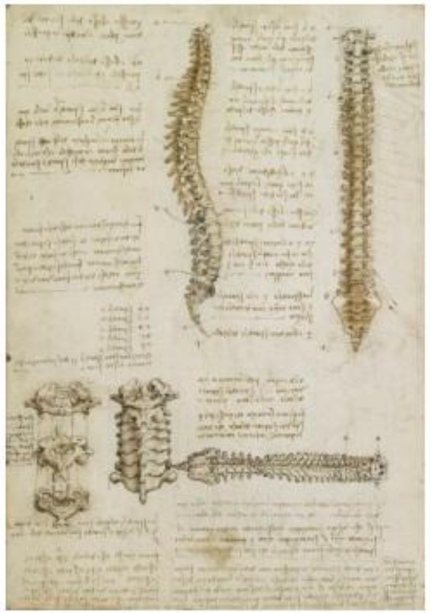
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Wolf Sausage, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm

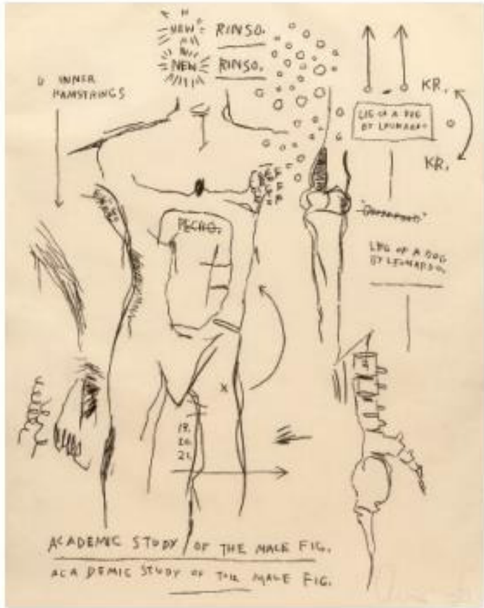
From *The Daros Suite*
Olympic, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
50 Cent Piece, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm

From *The Daros Suite*
Skin Head Wig, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm





Above, from left to right
LEONARDO DA VINCI
Verso: *The Vertebral Column*, c. 1510
Pen and ink with wash, over black chalk
11 1/4 x 7 7/8 inches
28.6 x 20 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Academic Study of Male Figure, 1983
Silkscreen on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 13
40 x 31 1/4 inches
101.6 x 79.4 cm

Opposite
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
One part of *Untitled (From Leonardo)*, 1983
Silkscreen in five parts on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 40
Each: 34 3/4 x 30 inches
88.3 x 76.2 cm

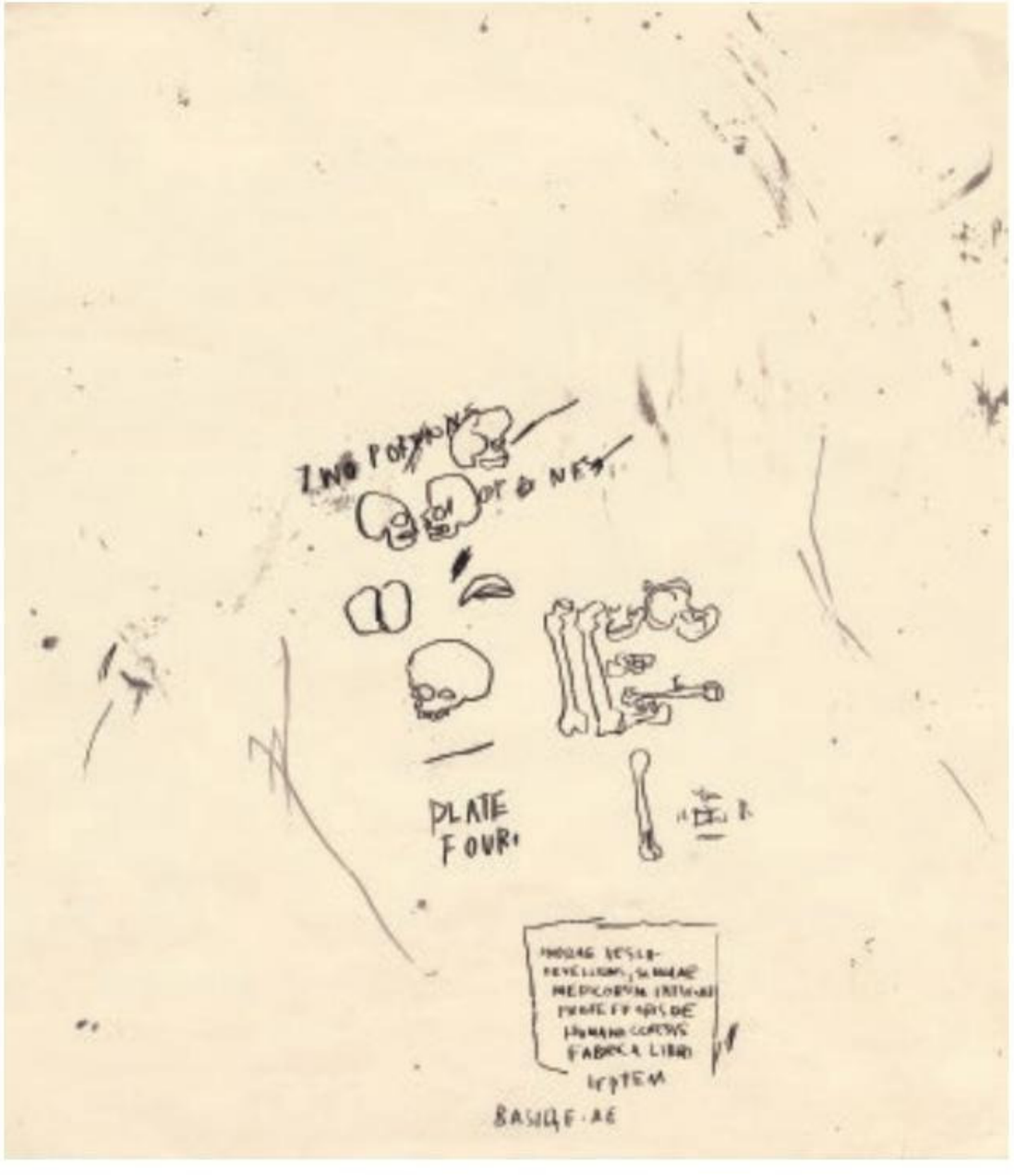
Daros Suite a historical figure appearing also in his major works on canvas produced at the same time.

With no prevailing subject or theme, the artwork in this group proves that the creator of these works was a mass consumer of information! Nothing seemed to escape him. Everything he encountered was digested and emerged in the form of images, words, and text. What is also evident is how little the artist has categorized, and prioritized the information he used; it is less about commentary and more about observation. Basquiat portrays the process of cognition—of how we take in, identify, and process external stimuli. These works portray the machinations of the mind. More precisely, they become a metaphor for the mind's capacity to witness without judgment, comment, or desire to control. *The Daros Suite* works are an astute documentation of how this process unfolds. Jean-Michel Basquiat came to this understanding not from study or learning, but by experience and observation of his world. While not initially evident, these works were highly personal, revealing how this young artist was in tune with how the mind consumes and processes its experiences.

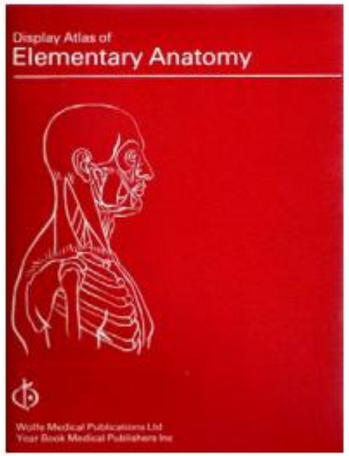
X. THE HUMAN ANATOMY/LEONARDO DA VINCI

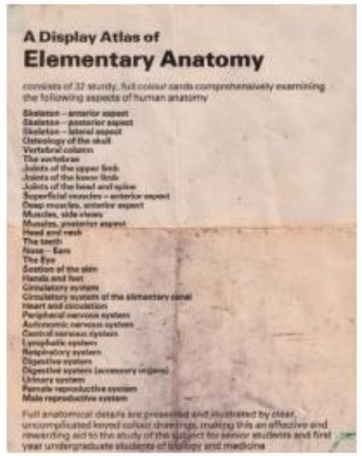
In May 1968, the seven-year-old Jean-Michel Basquiat was hit by an automobile while playing in the street. The young boy broke his arm and suffered various internal injuries, resulting in the removal of his spleen. While recuperating at King's County Hospital for one month, Matilde Basquiat brought her son a copy of *Gray's Anatomy*. To help him cope with his physical rehabilitation, his mother insightfully provided him with a means to better understand the mysteries and complexities of the human body. While there are no drawings from this time, one might assume that Basquiat not only studied the text, but also drew from it. Basquiat regularly returned to the subject of the human anatomy. When visiting Zurich, Switzerland at the time of his first exhibition with Bruno Bischofberger in September 1982, he carried with him a copy of *A Display Atlas of Elementary Anatomy*, which consists of thirty-two cards that display details of human anatomy.[22]

It would only be a matter of time before Basquiat, now the ever-inquisitive young artist, discovered Leonardo da



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Two parts of *Untitled (From Leonardo)*,1983
Silkscreen in five parts on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 40
Each: 34 3/4 x 30 inches
88.3 x 76.2 cm





Above, from left to right
PETER DALY (editor)
Display Atlas of Elementary Anatomy (cover), 1980
10 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches
25.7 x 21 cm

Display Atlas of Elementary Anatomy (chart), 1980
10 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches
25.7 x 21 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on backside of page of *Display Atlas of Elementary Anatomy*
10 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches
25.7 x 21 cm

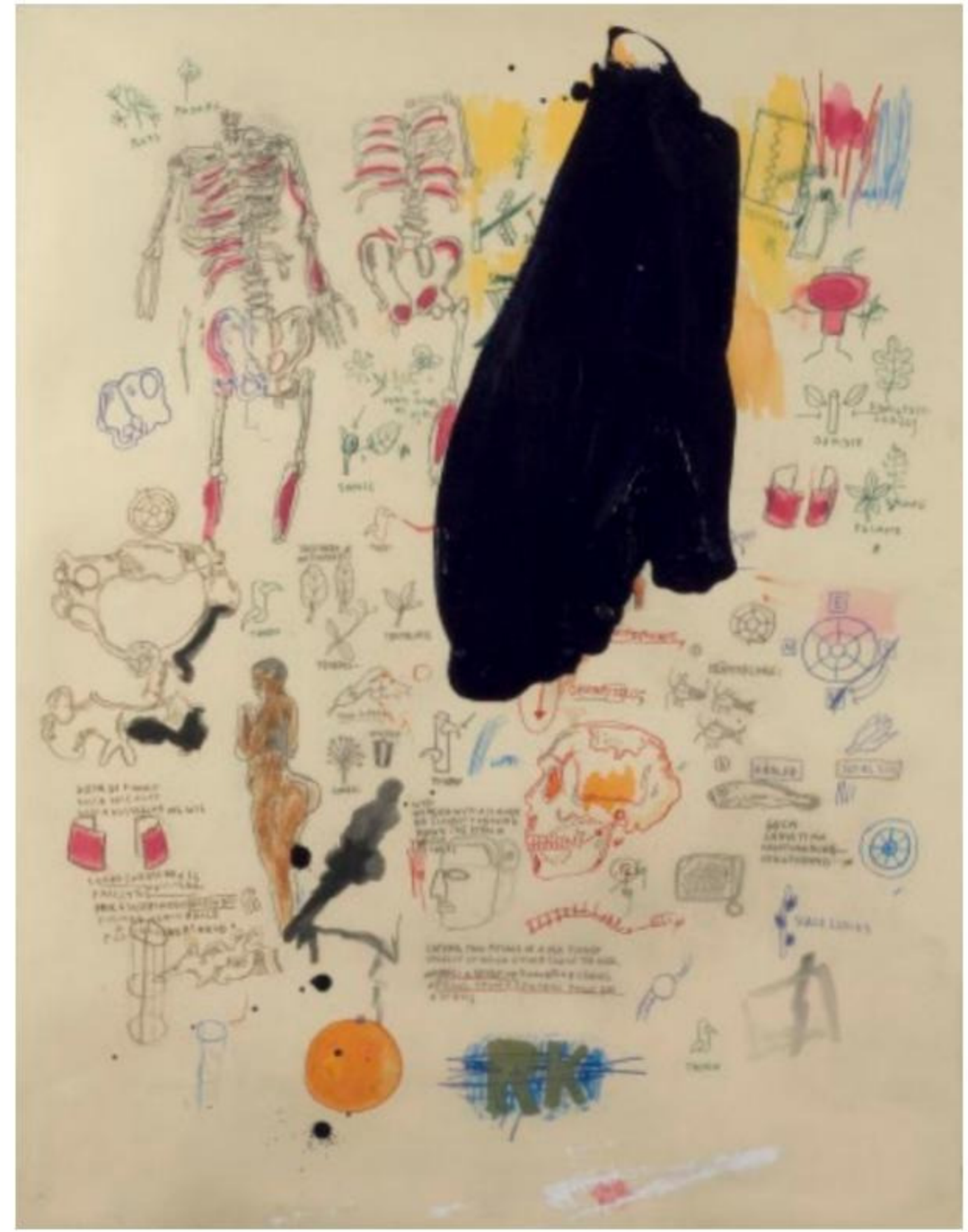
Opposite
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1986
Acrylic, oil paintstick, ink, graphite, and colored pencil on paper
30 x 22 inches
76.2 x 55.9 cm

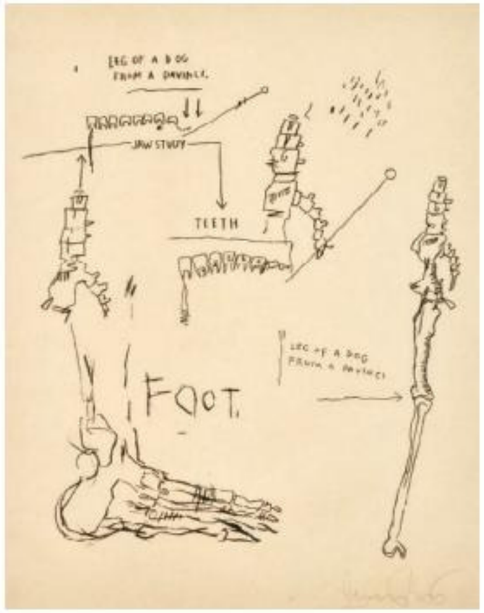
Vinci's investigative studies of the human body, from anatomical to physiological, from birth to death. In the work of Leonardo, Basquiat found a viable means of educating himself about human form and function. In both the drawings and texts of Leonardo, Basquiat would have identified with a kindred spirit able to transform scientific data into artistic vision. Leonardo's compulsive investigation of human anatomy and physiology became a lifelong passion for Basquiat.

Basquiat's exhibition at the Fun Gallery in November 1982 included several of his most accomplished works. In this now historic exhibition, Basquiat showed *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits* (1982). In this work, Basquiat included a number of images making direct reference to the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, including studies of the human leg, torso, and feet. This four-panel painting represents the artist's pinnacle of achievement combining references from the art of the Renaissance master and his own portrayal of the human figure. Basquiat's attraction to the anatomical drawings of Leonardo was clearly not limited to the realization of *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits*. Just a few months after the exhibition of the painting, he produced three silkscreen editions in his Venice studio. Several of the images in *Untitled: From Leonardo, Academic Study of the Male Figure*, and *Leg of a Dog* derive from portions of drawings by Leonardo: a spine, teeth, parts of bones, and a skull. One of the five sheets comprising *Untitled: From Leonardo* depicts five classically-influenced, male figures. The representation of an idealized human figure is an anomaly in Basquiat's paintings and drawings. Poses derived from classical sculpture are rare in the drawings of Leonardo, and it remains unclear whether the figures included in Basquiat's print derive from a specific source in Leonardo's drawings.[23] I propose that Basquiat chose to depict these figures in classical poses to create a contrast with the more "gritty" images of bones, skulls, and body parts. While Basquiat's classical figures allude to an idealized human, his figurative and text references to the internal features of the human being present a very different picture of who we are. Bones and skulls draw us back to the physical realities of the body. While Basquiat's painting *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits* has a multitude of references to specific Leonardo drawings, the work also includes a working black man toiling with a sledgehammer on a railroad track. Like *Untitled: From Leonardo*, the subject of Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits is the duality of the ideal and the real in the human experience.

XI. LATE WORKS ON PAPER

Having focused on the works on paper that reveal significant artistic developments in the artist's career, there is another we should acknowledge. In contrast to almost all other works on paper by the artist, several of the artist's late works, created in 1987–88, were executed on paper that was then laid down onto canvas.[24] Although they were made on paper, they were conceived and presented as paintings. While much of the discussion of these works will be reserved for the final chapter of this study, a few remarks are appropriate in concluding the overall discussion of works on paper in the oeuvre.





Above, from left to right
LEONARDO DA VINCI
Recto: The Bones of the Foot, and the Shoulder, c. 1510
Pen and ink with wash, over traces of black chalk
11 1/4 x 7 3/4 inches
28.7 x 19.8 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Leg of a Dog, 1983
Silkscreen on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 11
40 x 31 1/4 inches
101.6 x 79.4 cm

Opposite
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick and paper collage on canvas
Polyptych: 84 x 78 inches
213.5 x 198 cm

In 1987–88, Basquiat planned seven works on paper with the intent of mounting each onto canvas. In 1987 he produced *Victor 25448*, *Eroica*, *Untitled*, *Untitled*, and *Pegasus;* in the following year he completed *Eroica I* and *Eroica II*. These last two, along with *Victor 25448*, were included by the artist in his final gallery exhibition at the Vrej Baghoomian Gallery from April 29 to June 11, 1988. Each of the seven works is different in size, ranging from 89 x 90 inches to 90 x 186 inches. Each work, produced on a single sheet of paper, was executed on the floor of the artist's studio, then mounted onto a canvas picture support.[25]

Pegasus, in particular, may be seen as an extension and elaboration on many of the esthetic and thematic concerns of the artist's earlier innovative series of drawings created for *Tuxedo* and *Untitled*, his two silkscreen editions printed on canvas. Like the earlier works, it presents an overwhelming array of texts and images, again demonstrating Basquiat's unique capacity to absorb and express a wide range of references from popular culture, world history, science, human anatomy, and personal experience. Again, Basquiat reveals his ability to bring visual order to a range of diverse elements, coming together in a brilliant pictorial realization.

Many of the textural references in *Pegasus* are to real-life experience. What is presented does not necessarily align with our rational, familiar vision of the world we live in. Basquiat provides hints on how to navigate through the work. *Pegasus* is discussed in considerable depth in the final chapter of this study. At this point I note that over time and repeated viewing, this defining work in Basquiat's oeuvre is best understood not as a representation of the world we have known, but as a representation of the mental processes we go through as we assimilate and absorb our experiences. ■

NOTES

1. Portions of this chapter were published, in slightly different form, in my book *Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawing / Work from the Schorr Family Collection* New York, Acquavella Rizzoli, 2014.

2. Franklin Sirmans, "Chronology," *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 1992. New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, page 233.

3. This includes the two exhibitions of the collaborative paintings Basquiat produced with Andy Warhol.

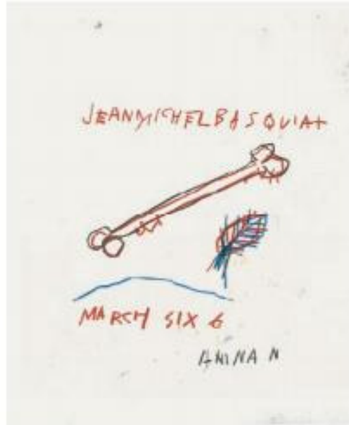
4. I would like to thank Walter Soppelsa and Marianne Aebersold of the Daros Collection for their help, including the removal of several of the works from their frames and photography of the back of each work.

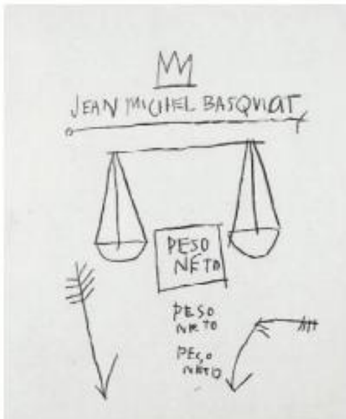
5. That the works are titled also reflects Bruno Bischofberger's initiative in having the works both signed and titled.

6. Basquiat's interest in Beat poetry, and more specifically the work of William Burroughs, should be acknowledged. There are several accounts of Basquiat carrying the author's *Naked Lunch* with him as he made his way around Manhattan. In the work of Burroughs, the artist would have found an important precedent for a detached, non-judgmental use of source material.

7. Skelly, also called "skully," is a children's game played on the streets of New York and other urban areas. Sketched on the street or sidewalk, usually in chalk, a skelly board allows a game for between two and six players.

8. *Untitled*, 1981. Oil paintstick on paper, 40 x 60 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Fractional gift of Sheldon Solo. Because Basquiat kept this work, it was neither signed nor titled. It was included in the 1992 Robert





JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Series of twelve drawings
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
Each: 17 x 14 inches
43 x 35.5 cm

Miller exhibition, "Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawings," at which time it was acquired and fractionally given to MOMA.

9. A single painting catalogue, *Jean-Michel Basquiat, Untitled (Head of Madman)*, accompanied the sale of the work *Untitled (Head of Madman)* (1982). Oil paintstick on paper (mounted on linen), 43 x 30 1/4." New York, Christie's, 2013. The inside cover of the catalogue has the image of Jack Nicholson from the film *The Shining* juxtaposed with the first page of the catalogue reproducing the work.

10. Ibid. In the catalogue, Diego Cortez's "Commentary" discusses his titling of the work. Diego Cortez gave the subtitle to this work when he acquired it for Peter Brams. Christie's uses Cortez's argument to support their use of the subtitle.

11. It is important to note that even though several of these paintings have been titled *Self Portrait*, this titling is not by the artist. As only a few of these works were titled on the back of the canvas by the artist, most must be considered descriptive titles. While titling each as "self portrait" may, in fact be correct as to the identity of the person depicted, each of the works which is not titled on the back is probably best referred to as *Untitled*.

12. It remains to be determined if this work was titled on the back by the artist.

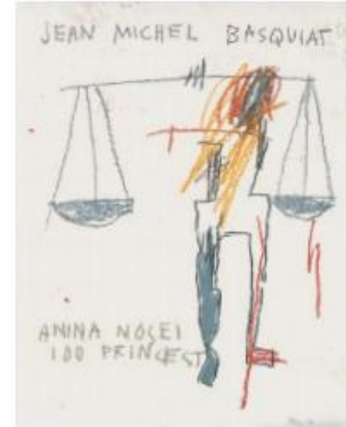
13. During the 1983 making of Jean-Michel Basquiat's silkscreen editions produced at New City Editions, Venice, California, the artist created a drawing of Fred Hoffman, Joel Stearns and the artist. *(Untitled) (Fred, Joel, Jean-Michel)* (1983), silkscreen ink (gouache) and pencil on paper, 50 1/4 x 89 1/2. David Simkins Collection, Miami, Florida. The image of the artist in this work closely resembles many of the works referred to and discussed as self portraits.

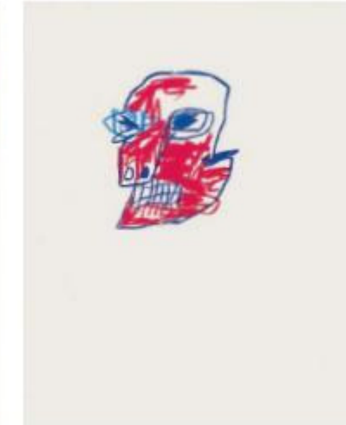
14. Herb and Lenore Schorr commented upon their acquisition of this work in several conversations with the author between November 2013 and February 2014.

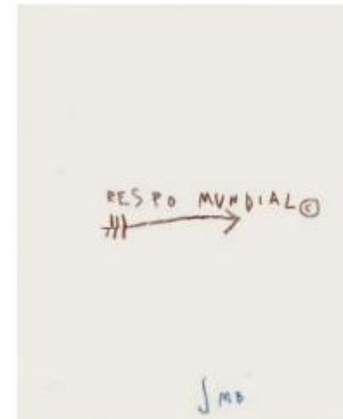
15. The two 60 x 40 inch works on paper kept by Basquiat were included in the 1990 exhibition held at the Robert Miller Gallery, "Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawings." Both of these works were acquired from this exhibition by John McEnroe and are currently in the Brant Foundation, Greenwich, Connecticut.

16. As one can see in this work, it is signed and dated by the artist. When used in the creation of the silkscreen *Tuxedo*, it was not signed, indicating that Basquiat signed this individual portion of the work at a later date, most likely when it was sold and left his possession.

17. At the time of Basquiat's death, no fewer than nine of the sixteen works on paper, which were the original drawings used to create *Tuxedo*, were in the artist's collection. It remains unclear when the other seven were distributed. The sheet containing the image of the crown *(Untitled)* (1982),







(acrylic, ballpoint pen ink, paper collage on paper, 20 x 29 inches) is in the collection of Lio Malca, acquired from Peter Brams through Diego Cortez.

18. *Untitled* (1983) was also produced in association with New City Editions (Venice, California) in 1983. After the completion of the silkscreen, the twenty-eight part work on paper was laid down onto canvas.

19. FH arranged for their meeting and accompanied JMB to Gemini GEL.

20. This dating actually raises questions as the artist primarily resided in Los Angeles from November 1982 through the opening of his second exhibition with Larry Gagosian in March 1983. While it is possible that some of the works were created prior to Basquiat's stay in Venice, the author thinks that the dating could be reconsidered and that the works were executed in spring, 1983. This dating would not only be based on the dates of Basquiat's Venice residency, but on the relationship of these works to paintings executed in 1983.

21. In email correspondence with the author, the Daros Collection has confirmed that in response to the author's request, several of the thirty-two drawings were examined out of the frame and that the works are signed, titled and dated on the verso. In discussing the titling of the works with Bruno Bischofberger (January 27–28, 2015) the dealer accounts for the titling as resulting from his insistence that each work be signed, dated and titled.

22. We know this from the recently discovered cover sheet of this book in the possession of a woman with whom Basquiat became acquainted during his stay in Zurich. He gave her the cover sheet, signing the back as well as writing his New York City address for her possible future visit to see the young artist. I am appreciative to Jorg Lederle for providing me with this information and images of both the Anatomy Chart and Basquiat's inscription on the verso.

23. A possible source for Basquiat's figures is Leonardo da Vinci's *Figural Studies for the Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1481, pen and ink; reproduced in Johannes Nathan and Frank Zöllner, *Leonardo da Vinci. Complete Paintings and Drawings*. 2011, Taschen, page 266, number 12.

24. There are earlier examples of Basquiat laying a work on paper onto canvas. One earlier example is *Untitled* (1983), the work created for the production of *Untitled* (1983) Basquiat's second silkscreen print on canvas.

25. At an early point in their production, *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* were a single work on one sheet of paper. At some point Basquiat cut the one sheet of paper into two, and clearly eliminated a portion of the work in the middle. I acknowledge Lio Malca, who as the previous owner of *Eroica II*, carefully considered both works and conveyed to me this observation.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Acque Pericolose (Poison Oasis) (detail), 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick and spray paint on canvas
66 x 96 inches
167.5 x 244 cm

CHAPTER 3

THE SUBJECTS OF THE ARTIST[1]

The idea that the soul will join with the ecstatic
Just because the body is rotten—
That is all fantasy.
What is found now is found then.
If you find nothing now,
You will simply end up with an apartment in the
City of Death.

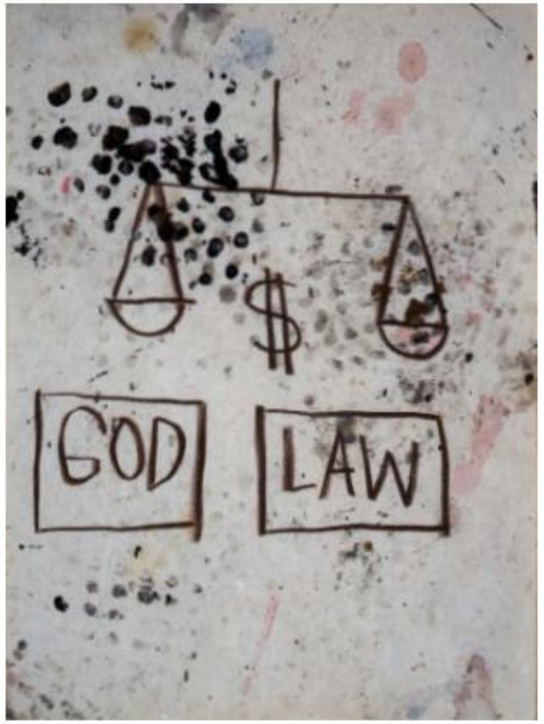
Kabir[2]

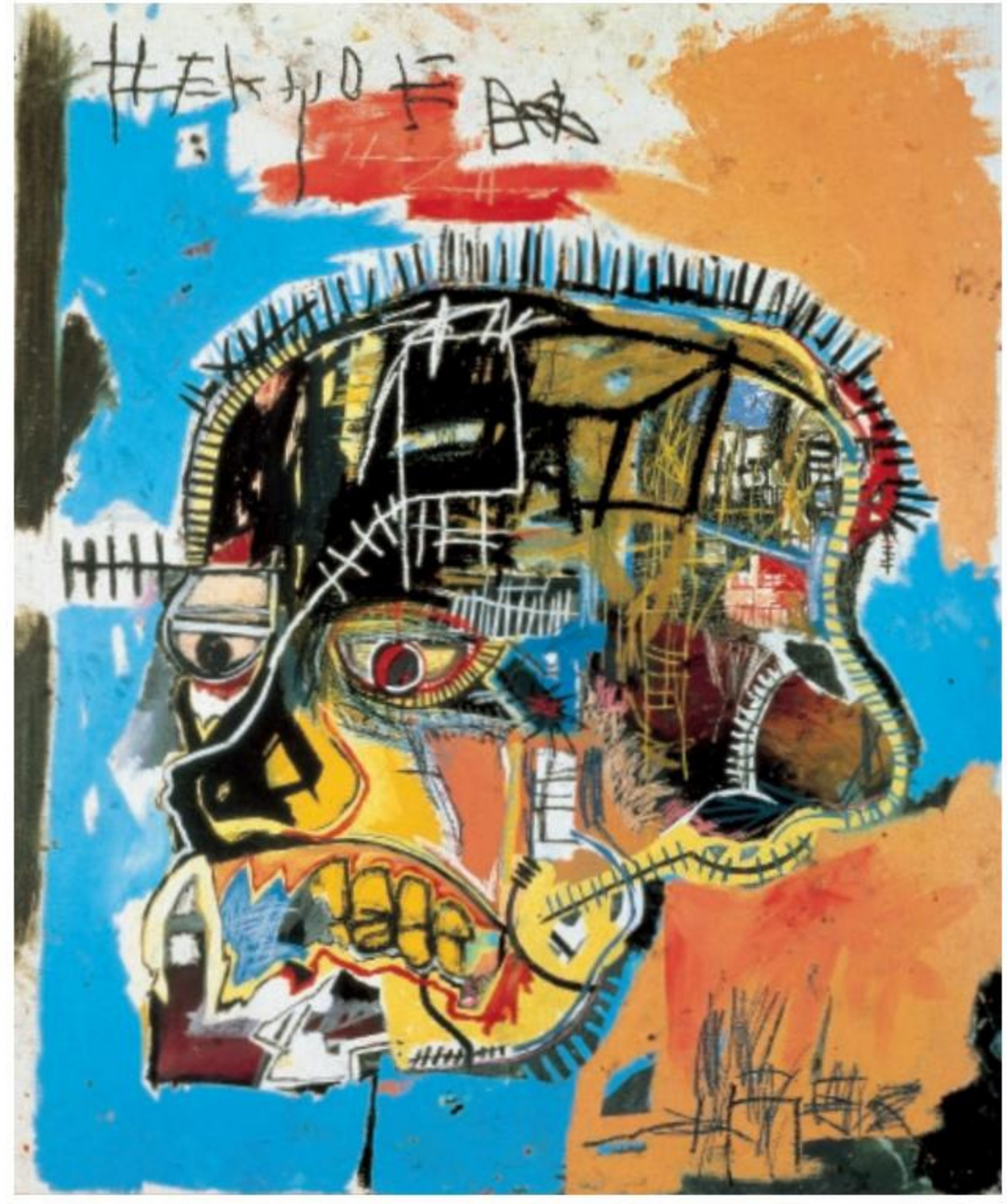
UNDERLYING JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT'S SENSE OF HIMSELF AS an artist was his innate capacity to function as an oracle, distilling his perceptions of the outside world down to their essence and, in turn, projecting them outward through his creative acts. This recognition of his role first manifested itself in street actions wherein, under the tag name of SAMO, he transformed his own observations into pithy text messages inscribed on the edifices of the urban environment. This effort quickly became the basis for his studio output, which was informed by the same process of distillation, revealing a more basic truth locked within a given event or thought. As his career unfolded, the young artist applied the same intense scrutiny previously reserved for the world around him to the emotional and spiritual aspects of his own being.

Beginning in early 1981, when he was barely twenty years of age, Basquiat went through what would be a defining period in his career. Drawing from his own life experiences as a way to address larger human concerns, he produced five key works over an eighteen-month period: *Untitled* (1981), *Acque Pericolose* (1981), *Per Capita* (1981), *Notary* (1983), and *La Colomba* (1983). These works not only offer insight into this period in Basquiat's career but also reveal the depth of his concern for portraying man's inner-life experience. These works are testament to Basquiat's irrefutable power to transcend the individual and address broader issues and universal themes.

UNTITLED (1981)

Sometime early in 1981, Basquiat began a painting depicting an oversized head extending across the pictorial field, an image that had no precedent in earlier sketches, drawings, or paintings. Showing little regard for either physiognomic accuracy or individual likeness, Basquiat chose to emphasize the expressive qualities of the head. With its public presentation, this painting declared Basquiat's arrival as a new and authentic voice in the world of contemporary art. Unlike many of his later paintings, which were completed quickly, *Untitled* was begun and then put aside for several months,[3] to be completed later in the year.[4] One can only speculate about the reasons for this hesitation, but several individuals close to the artist—including myself and Annina Nosei, the artist's dealer at the time—suspect that this young, unseasoned artist hesitated to complete the work because he was caught off guard, possibly even frightened, by the power and energy emanating from this unexpected image. Others had a comparable reaction, later in the year, shortly after the work was first publicly exhibited.





From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (God/Law), 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
10 3/4 x 8 1/2 inches
27.3 x 21.6 cm

Untitled, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
81 x 69 1/4 inches
207 x 176 cm

While the painting was presented in the artist's debut exhibition in New York as *Untitled*, when it entered the collection of its current owners a few months later the word "Skull" had been appended to the designation *Untitled* and accompanied the painting until the publication of my earlier text, "The Defining Years: Notes on Five Key Works,"[5] at which time the owners of the work revised the titling of the work to its current and correct title *Untitled*. The Whitney retrospective catalogue most likely picked up the parenthetical subtitle from the loan form information supplied by the lender.[6] Through extensive conversations with the registrar of the lender in January–April 2004, we have determined that the lender's titling of the painting as *Untitled* (p. 115) is based on the title included in the original invoice that accompanied their purchase of the painting in 1982. The problem with subtitling it "Skull" becomes evident when one considers just one recent interpretation of the work: Alain Jouffroy states, "There are fewer death heads at the beginning of the 1980s, except for this magnificent painting from 1981 called *Skull*, in which the skull keeps his eyes wide open like a living head"[7] The mistitling of this work resulted from the misinterpretation of the work; and may be attributable to both the uniqueness of its subject matter and the way it is presented. Most likely, the change in title was the result of confusing the work with the more traditional iconography of the memento mori, in which a skull implies death. However, Basquiat's head—having little if any precedent in modern art history—requires more careful analysis. Close inspection reveals that this head, unlike a skull, is alive and responsive to external stimuli; as such, it seems alert to our world while simultaneously allowing us to penetrate its psycho-spiritual recesses. Basquiat's representation of a single enlarged head is a breakthrough. The visual information it contains provides insight into many of the artist's strategies dealing with dichotomy, which he would adopt over the following eighteen months.

Untitled depicts the left upper and lower teeth, possibly accounting for the work's misinterpretation as a skull by some. But *Untitled* clearly also shows functioning facial features as well: the left ear, both eyes, and the nose. There is even a suggestion of hair. While the handling of these features could hardly be characterized as realistic, neither are they grossly distorted or misrepresented. Rather, the way they are portrayed clarifies the artist's intent in presenting a vitally interactive being fully in possession of the means to process external stimuli. That is, the artist also reveals less tangible aspects of the head, such as the subtle neural pathways connecting the sense organs to their internal processor. This concern for sensory and cognitive activity negates the interpretation of the head as an inanimate skull. What this work ultimately captures is the fluidity between external and internal—the complex, living processes connecting seeing, hearing, smelling, and knowing.

Untitled indicates that, from the outset, Basquiat was fascinated by greater realities than meet the eye. This work introduces the unique X-ray-like vision he brought to his subjects. His work appears to break down the dichotomy between the external and the internal, intuiting and revealing the innermost aspects of psychic life. In so doing, the artist extends the concern for spiritual truths advanced most notably by the abstract expressionists four decades earlier. This formative generation of American artists sought to capture man's inherent nature and deal with the question of identity by reasserting "man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationships to the absolute emotions... We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth... The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation."[8] Artists with these aspirations, such as Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman, attempted to represent a world beyond that which is identified solely with physical experience. Though Basquiat came from a completely different social milieu and histor-

ical context, he was similarly engaged in the pursuit of fundamental truths. However, he did not achieve this through abstraction, but through newly discovered possibilities for representation. As he pursued his creative activities, the young painter recognized that his breakthroughs would occur in direct relationship to his ability to penetrate intuitively the façade of physical form and appearance and allow other truths and realities to surface.

ACQUE PERICOLOSE

If *Untitled* announced Basquiat's arrival, the magnitude of that event was only enhanced by the realization of two other works within a matter of weeks, the first of which was *Acque Pericolose*. Depicting a single black male figure, it represents the first time the artist undertook complex narrative subject matter. The work centers on a full-length male nude whose arms are folded across his chest and who is placed in a vaguely defined landscape setting, midway between a coiled snake and a seemingly decomposing cow with two flies hovering over the remains of its head. The figure's head, arms, and hands reveal a cubist-inspired reductivism that organizes as well as consolidates the information included.

The mystery and power of this haunting figure are reinforced by the rich, atmospheric landscape into which it has been placed. To the right of the central figure, multiple hints of sky and subtle tonal modulations suggesting atmospheric effects invite the viewer to enter a hospitable space of sensual pleasure. By contrast, the shrill tones of red, orange, and yellow appearing on the other side of the figure allude to something other than realism. These colors are not employed for their representational credibility but for their expressive power and symbolic associations; while the artist's color certainly exudes sensuality, possibly even the hint of earthly pleasure, its chromatic intensity connotes an apocalyptic world of fire and upheaval.

A comparable duality is asserted by the brushwork and handling of line. The cow's skeletal structure is represented by a half dozen paint-loaded black brushstrokes along with a very few lines drawn in oil paintstick. It is unclear whether the animal is represented as alive or dead, as thinly layered sepia brown brushstrokes also suggest corpulent mass. While the artist's subtle modeling of form suggests life, his equally adept use of line suggests a moment of transition from life to death. A coiled snake and a pair of hovering flies imply imminent death, a reading echoed by the artist's inclusion of the Greek symbols alpha and omega interspersed between arrows pointing both to the earth and to the heavens. Basquiat's inclusion of these dichotomous symbols, here used consistently with their rich iconographic history, alludes to "the beginning and the ending" (Revelation 1:8) as expressed in religious and spiritual texts and traditions.

Acque Pericolose (or *Poison Oasis*, as the work has often been called)[9] hints at mortality. The image of a towering, nude male figure—with long, flowing dreadlocks that in places become intertwined with (and consequently are often confused with) the accompanying halo—stands not only as the artist's representation of the transcendence of the mortality of human flesh; in its details it reveals the artist's insight into the means of achieving such a state. In what may be interpreted as Basquiat's first major self portrait, the artist has depicted himself as vulnerable, yet possessed of pride and authority.[10] Thus, the man's arms are positioned across his chest in a gesture symbolic of self-surrender—a sense of being at peace with himself even though he is surrounded by death and chaos.

This inner harmony is ratified by the halo hovering above and behind the figure's head.[11] The preponderance of halo or crown-like imagery in Basquiat's oeuvre lends a spiritual aspect to the work. It should be kept in mind that his use of such symbolism changed over time. By 1982, Basquiat had more or less replaced the halo with a personalized, even trademark, image of a three-pointed crown.[12] The crown often accompanied a figure and occasionally appeared on its own throughout the remainder of the artist's career.

In *Acque Pericolose*, the artist's juxtaposition of the figure's head and a radiant orb implies inward reflection—the figure consumed by a transformative force or power. This reading is supported by the inclusion of a small, lit flashlight (or torch) positioned vertically alongside the figure's head. This image was Basquiat's affirmation of the mind's central role in self-realization.[13] This simple yet profound understanding of the role of the mind is the basis of all spiritual pursuit. In Basquiat's case, the use of symbolic references of this kind was entirely intuitive and did not incorporate any particular religious or metaphysical doctrine. His symbolism of the mind does, however, roughly correspond, for example, to Christ's response to Mary Magdalene as given in apocryphal sources. She asks "how one who sees a vision knows it to be true through the soul or through the spirit?" The Savior answers and says, "one does not see through the soul, nor through the spirit, but the mind which is between the two: that is what sees the vision."[14] In this light, Basquiat's depiction of himself—as alone and stripped bare at the crossroads between life and death—takes its place alongside countless representations of saints and historical figures at their moments of self-realization.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Acque Pericolose (Poison Oasis), 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick and spray paint on canvas
66 x 96 inches
167.5 x 244 cm

That a man of less than twenty-one years old was able to capture convincingly his own mortality is in itself noteworthy. That he could instill this subject with such credibility, and at the same time acknowledge the enlightenment of the soul, is nothing less than remarkable.

PER CAPITA

The isolated male figure debuted in *Acque Pericolose* in the middle of 1981 underwent a significant transition over the subsequent twelve months. While this iconic subject was first represented as a raw, fully exposed, and humbled youth, it quickly evolved within a series of paintings, each showing a now fully mature male figure filling a significant portion of the pictorial field and accompanied by a compendium of symbolic references. Indicative of newfound power and emerging identity, these works were Basquiat's declaration of his freedom of expression. Assimilating figure, text, and symbolic references with compelling narrative content, this group of works became the basis for the artist's public reception.

Per Capita is Basquiat's third major painting from 1981. It depicts a single male figure wearing Everlast boxing shorts, positioned halfway between a vaguely defined cityscape and a surrounding pictorial field of abstract atmospheric effects. The work evolved out of an earlier group of untitled works that I have earlier referred to as *Cityscapes*, which were the first artworks Basquiat executed in a strictly studio context.[15] As noted elsewhere in this volume, each of the *Cityscapes* contains aspects of the pictorial techniques and imagery previously used in Basquiat's graffiti works executed under the SAMO tag in 1979 and 1980. Unleashed at the moment of his initial public recognition (first in Diego Cortez's Times Square

FLIP SCHULKE
Cassius Clay at the 5th Street gym (with Angelo Dundee), Miami Beach, 1961

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Per Capita, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
80 x 150 inches
203 x 381 cm

Show, then through Basquiat's lead role in Glenn O'Brien's film *New York Beat*), *Per Capita* initiates the iconography of male boxers, red and black warriors, and other male figures evincing heroic, even exalted, gestures that characterize some of his most recognized paintings, including *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump* (1982), *Profit I* (1982), *Untitled (Self Portrait)* (1982),[16] and *Untitled (Boxer)* (1982).

The iconographic breakthroughs of *Per Capita* were a result of the artist's pursuit of specific pictorial strategies. As part and parcel of this newfound concern for thematic content, Basquiat implemented two new devices, both of which would become mainstays of his pictorial vocabulary. In addition to exploring the integration of image and text, Basquiat discovered more complex and elaborate means of "layering" the distinct planes of illusionistic space created by form, color, line, and atmospheric effects into a unified composition. These strategies became especially pronounced through the artist's practice of collaging both original and photocopied drawings directly onto the canvas. While there are no collaged drawings in *Per Capita*, this work signaled to the artist the possibility of introducing new source material as he sought to unify text and image. The subsequent introduction of a collaged ground not only facilitated the union of image and text but also enabled a more seamless integration of an "exterior" world into the fictive pictorial realm. Basquiat also reaffirmed what he had initially resolved in *Acque Pericolose*—that by applying thin, subtly modulated hues, he could build up rich atmospheric effects, thereby creating an arena in which his figures could breathe and interact. Thus text-image integration and pictorial layering went hand in hand. Enhanced by the artist's experience as a graffiti tagger, where he reveled in the pictorial qualities of walls overlaid with layers of history (including the words and phrases Basquiat himself applied), these new artistic discoveries reached their first phase of resolution in *Per Capita*.

Having synthesized his means of expression, Basquiat felt comfortable adapting a number of well-recognized, even populist symbols for his personal iconography.[17] In *Per Capita*, the Latin words E PLURIBUS—part of the motto "E pluribus unum," meaning "out of many, one"—are inscribed in the topmost portion of the painting. These words are often associated with the image of a hand holding a bouquet of flowers, and are found on the Great Seal of the United States, where they refer to the historical unification of the thirteen original American colonies into one Union, and they also appear on U.S. currency. By including E PLURIBUS along with, in the upper left, a partial alphabetical listing of states in the Union and the respective per capita income of their citizens, Basquiat points to the inequities of monetary distribution that divide the wealthy (CALIFORNIA $10,856) and the impoverished (ALABAMA $7,484), the dichotomy of rich versus poor. *Per Capita* thereby expresses the artist's concern for the common people and their labor found in many of his earliest paintings, such as an *Untitled* (1981), in which a prison inmate wearing a number holds a rake or broom, the tool of his labor.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Notary, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage
on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 71 x 158 inches
180.5 x 401.5 cm

Throughout Basquiat's career, political and social commentary functioned as a springboard to deeper truths about the individual. Thus, in *Per Capita*, the radiating halo hovering over the black boxer's head as he holds a burning torch in his left hand seems to assert a universal theme. While the social-political commentary is undeniable, that does not adequately reflect the totality of the work. The inclusion of a lit torch—replacing the more traditional "E pluribus unum" bouquet—could possibly refer to the torch carried from Mount Olympus and used at the ceremonies inaugurating Olympic competitions. In view of Basquiat's painting *Cassius Clay* and several other canvases devoted to the same subject, such as *St. Joe Louis Surrounded by Snakes* and *Sugar Ray Robinson*, it would not be far-fetched, then, to conclude that Basquiat's figure in *Per Capita* also pays homage to the legendary Olympic boxing champion and role model.[18] More important, however, the nimbus and torch in *Per Capita* allude to what the mythology scholar Joseph Campbell called "a unity that already exists,"[19] an underlying set of truths that binds all peoples in all times. Seen this way, Basquiat's black male—who first surfaces in *Acque Pericolose*, finds definition and clarification in *Per Capita*, and is subsequently developed in works such as *Untitled (Self Portrait)*, *Profit I*, and *Untitled (Boxer)*—declares the birthright of all humankind: the idea that each individual shares in, and is entitled to, his or her "per capita" distribution of God-given rights and responsibilities. It is this democratic ideal that is proclaimed by Basquiat's champion as he enters the stadium of self-realization.

NOTARY

By the spring of 1983, Basquiat was immersed in a number of highly complex paintings using themes and pictorial strategies developed over the previous eighteen months. The culmination of these is *Notary* (pp. 120-121), completed in New York in March 1983.

A comprehensive indicator of how the artist viewed himself at the apex of his career,[20] *Notary* is a rich compendium of figurative imagery and references accompanied by an array of specific textual references to Greek mythology, Roman history, African tribal culture, systems of monetary exchange, and natural commodities, as well as states of health and well-being. The images and texts are presented as part of one loosely unified web or network. Indeed, *Notary* may be seen as a summation of the artist's interest in integrating image and text, as well as painting and drawing. In addition, the work shows Basquiat's slow and methodical building-up of the picture's surface, layer upon layer—sometimes by painting over an image, sometimes by crossing one out, and in a few areas he allows traces of collaged silkscreen prints to be seen beneath the picture's surface.[21]

As previously noted, *Notary*, along with several other key works from this period, was painted using an unusual system of open stretcher bars. This novel method frames the work's content in such a way as to declare that the fractured glimpses that the artist permits into his psyche requires patience. Unraveling his non-hierarchical presentation takes time; and the work's meaning unfolds only after hints and speculations are tested, slowly building up a more comprehensive set of conclusions.

The dual inscription of the word DUMARIUS[22] in *Notary* further suggests that Basquiat saw it as his obligation to guide us through his psychic self-portrayal. The word, which also appears in *The Nile*, executed at the same time, is derived from a Greek inscription that appeared in connection with the reproduction of an African rock painting in Burchard Brentjes's well-known reference on this subject,[23] and Brentjes's discussion of the nomadic Blemyan tribe in the Eastern Sahara includes an image of Saint George accompanied by the Greek inscription. As Brentjes notes, disparate images scratched on the rocks by the Blemyans—including images of Egyptian gods, an ox with the ancient Libyan decorated horns, Bedouin camels, and old Arabian altars, all depicted side by side—were the tribesmen's means of recording their presence at a specific location for the benefit of fellow tribesmen who would follow them. In essence, the images functioned as a seal, declaring the existence—both physical and spiritual—of the Blemyan tribesmen. Basquiat's reasons for including the reference are not documented, but in keeping with his self-image as an oracle—one who provides insight into a greater truth—it is likely that he found not only affirmation of his own nomadic journey in the practices of an earlier black culture, but also validation of his own artistic activities in the idea that one's marks and gestures could play a determining role in linking one person to another and guiding the passage of others.

Notary, then, can be seen as the summation of how Basquiat saw himself as he consolidated his creative achievements. Having mastered many of his formal strategies and extended his ability to address profound psychic experience, Basquiat revealed the depth of his own pathos in the work. *Notary* invites the viewer to penetrate visually into the core of the centrally positioned figure's nervous system, suggesting the introspection of an individual confronted by pain and suffering. Through text references to LEECHES, FLEAS, and PARASITES WHO ARE DESTINED TO DEHYDRATE, and diminish the FLESH of this MALE TORSO, it also shows the artist's vitality and energy being continually challenged by life-draining organisms. *Notary* is about the darker aspects of human existence, as suggested by no fewer than four references to the Greek god of the underworld, Pluto. As much as *Notary* reveals the artist's spiritual journey, it also exposes the plights and pitfalls along his path. *Notary* can be seen as Basquiat's portrayal of his own inner turmoil—his grappling with the contradictions between a realization of profound inner truths and the responsibilities accompanying public notoriety—at the very moment that his art had obtained public recognition and market value. Hence the ambiguous, and perhaps apologetic, inscription borrowed from U.S. currency: THIS NOTE FOR ALL DEBTS PUBLIC + PRIVATE.

PABLO PICASSO
Jeune fille devant un miroir (Girl Before a Mirror), 1932
Oil on canvas
64 x 51 1/4 inches
162.3 x 130.2 cm

LA COLOMBA

La Colomba (pp. 124-125), made at about the same time as *Notary*, also reveals anguish at this point in the artist's career. With this work Basquiat returned to the representation of a large head, similar to the one that eighteen months earlier had announced his debut. In contrast to *Untitled* (1981) (p. 115), however, *La Colomba* also depicts the upper torso, including portions of the arms, and further distinguishes itself in its distortion of human physiognomy.

Particularly notable in *La Colomba* is the shape of the head. In naturalistic terms, the length of the head, from front to back, would appear to be more than twice its height, and the neck, wide enough to support two heads, looks awkward. The head seems grossly distorted, possibly even deformed. Yet, rather than presume that such distortion exists purely to evoke psychological content, we would do well to consider this image in relation to the simultaneous presentation of two different views in a canonical work such as Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror*. In the Picasso painting, the youthful female figure filling the left half of the canvas contrasts with an aged woman reflected in the mirror on the right. The duality has been interpreted as suggesting maturation or the passage of time. In the Basquiat painting, the left and right halves of the composition would seem to show two different views of the head, which meet at the center. Basquiat used this organizational device not to represent the passage of time, but to distinguish the externally oriented facial features (on the left) from the internal workings of the mind (on the right).

As with *Untitled* (p. 115), the facial features of *La Colomba* capture the portals of sensory perception, admitting external stimuli, while the inside of the head suggests the capacity for the mind within to process the totality of experience. However, *La Colomba*, realized eighteen months later, enhances the drama unfolding between the internal and the external. Drips from the mouth, gestural slashes of red paint along the edge of the face, and the fact that the figure's right arm seems to have been amputated contribute to the sense of an extreme emotional state.

These features link this work to personal pathos of the kind expressed in *Notary*, but here the suggestions of physical pain and emotional suffering are offset by the artist's portrayal of the mind's inner recesses. In contrast to the amputated limb, a passage of white brushwork more or less extending the figure's other arm may be read as raising a symbolic white flag. In contrast to the anger and helpless rage consuming the externally directed senses, seen on the left of the picture, the raised limb on the right, associated with the mind, appears engaged in an act of surrender to something that we do not see. Tellingly, the title *La Colomba* translates from the Italian as "The Dove,"[24] and while the symbolism traditionally associated with that bird refers to the peaceful resolution of a conflict,

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
La Colomba, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas with tied wood supports
Diptych: 72 x 144 inches
183 x 365.5 cm

or good tidings, it can also be seen as signifying a victorious act of deliverance. In this way, perhaps, through the idea of deliverance, the work becomes linked to the artist's heroic black male figures.

To support this conclusion, we may note one of the many photocopied text drawings collaged into the painting. Directly below the back portion of the head, Basquiat refers to two biblical passages, writing: "1. REVELATION I, 11, 12 / 2. KINGS VII, 21, 22." The citation of the *First Book of Kings*, chapter 7, is especially helpful in deciphering *La Colomba* as it describes the construction of King Solomon's temple. Verses 21 and 22 refer to the construction of the left and right pillars in the porch of the temple; verse 22 reads (in King James): "And upon the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished." While this may account for the floral work to the right of the head in *La Colomba*,[23] we might nonetheless ask why the artist is interested in this particular passage of Scripture in the first place. As I have already said, the artist was rarely interested in any particular religious practice or its scriptural offerings. His quotation of Scripture shows his continual consumption of any and all source material that would support or validate his more intuitively discovered spiritual insights. Basquiat found in the symbolic architectural forms and their accompanying floral coronation of *First Kings* an expression of his own attempt at unifying the seemingly conflicting aspects of external experience (anguished facial features, a severed arm) and internal understanding (a white flag of surrender).

It seems doubtful that the young painter was concerned with the architecture of a historical temple, but perhaps the implied duality suggested by the two pillars, crowned by lilies, captured his imagination. By referring to the symbolism of this passage of Scripture, Basquiat was able to represent the duality of an external reality consumed by pain and suffering counterbalanced by surrender and an equally obtainable internal reality.

La Colomba's other scriptural citation, *Revelation* 1:11, also describes a kind of duality. The verse reads: "... saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches...." Some eighteen months after *Acque Pericolose's* reference to the union of a beginning (alpha) and end (omega), Basquiat returned to these symbols, perhaps as a means of envisioning his own transcendence of pain and suffering. At the top of *La Colomba's* head sits a very small crown, the artist's trademark substitute for the halo of the spiritual realm. In the context of the artist's personal iconography, used consistently with crown symbolism in other portrayals of the inner life, Basquiat's coronation of the head of *La Colomba* alludes to the king's central role as the provider of the resolution of conflict. The king commands his position because he either provides security and peace (the resolution or absence of conflict) or rightly or wrongly makes his subjects believe that they are attainable.

La Colomba captures aspects of Basquiat's personal sense of depletion, and possibly even anticipates his eventual demise, but what elevates this work is the artist's implied understanding of the means to traverse the troubled grounds of his life experience. Recalling his practice of crossing out words and images in works such as *Notary*, we realize that by negating certain references, Basquiat was essentially declaring that he was, so to speak, "not this, not that." By so doing, he refused to be identified with the limiting, transitory nature of his own life experience. This particular practice in his art recognizes the way people have, as the Buddhist monk and scholar Bhante Henepola Gunaratana puts it, "arbitrarily selected a certain bundle of perceptions, chopped them off from the surging flow of experience, and conceptualized them as separate, enduring entities."[26] Understanding the burden of our individual "bundle of perceptions," Basquiat affirms the mind's ability to get beyond them. In such a state, all becomes one, one becomes all; distinctions and differentiations are extinguished. Basquiat had indeed reached this artistic and spiritual turning point. He was at peace with the world. ■

NOTES

1. Portions of this chapter were originally published in different form in *Basquiat*, edited by Marc Mayer, co-curated and with essays by Fred Hoffman, Kellie Jones, Marc Mayer, and Franklin Sirmans. New York: Brooklyn Museum; London: Merrell Publishers, 2005, pages 129-38.

2. From Kabir's poem "Think While You Are Alive," in Robert Bly, *The Winged Energy of Delight: Selected Translations*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004, page 48.

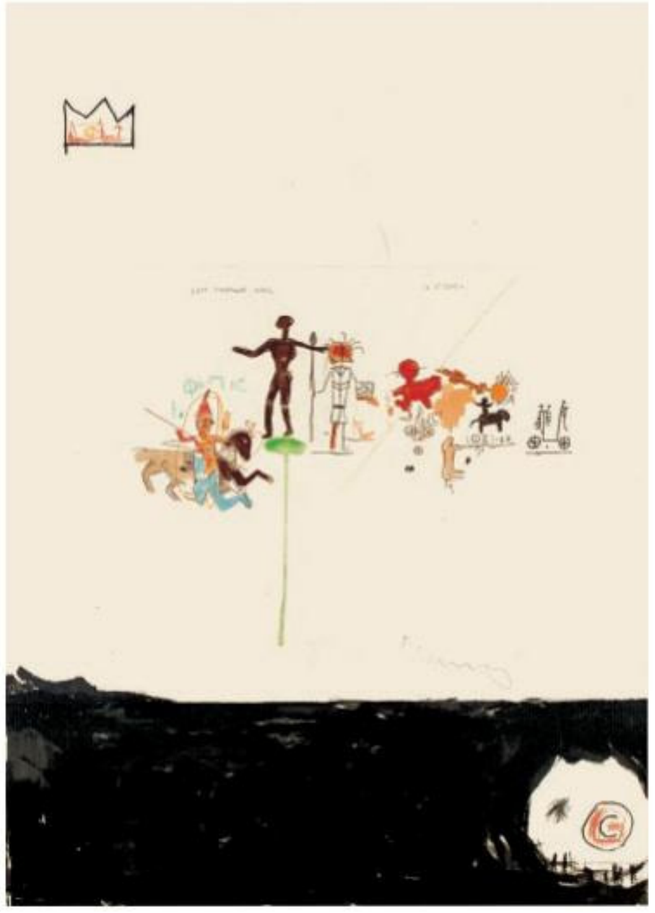
3. Annina Nosei, conversation with the author, November 10, 2003, New York.

4. The dating of this work has raised a certain degree of uncertainty. Most sources date it to 1981. The bill of sale, dating from 1982 from the Larry Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles, to its current owners, gives a date of 1982. Based on the documentation of the Annina Nosei Gallery, where the work was first exhibited in March 1982, and on that gallerist's recollections and the recollections of other individuals who saw the work at the Annina Nosei Gallery, as well as on stylistic analysis, the work must be dated to 1981.

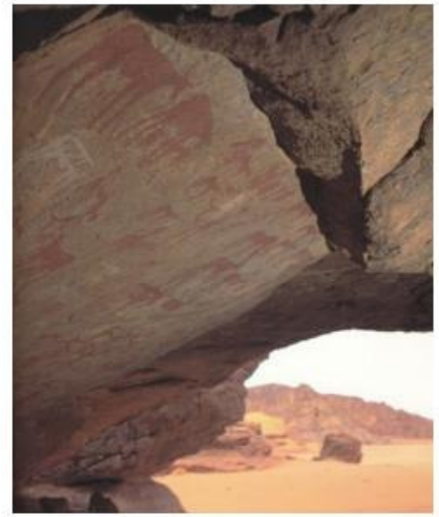
5. Marc Mayer, editor, *Basquiat*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, 2005, p. 129.

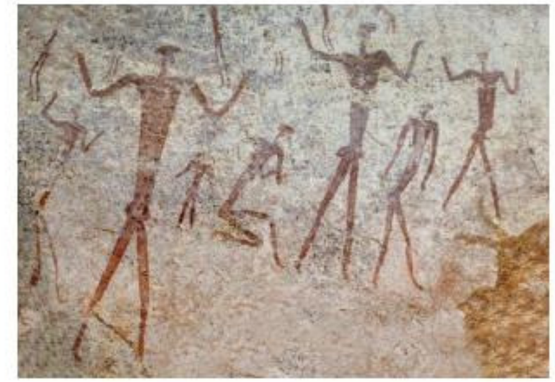
6. Most of the literature, including the catalogue of the first American retrospective, Marshall et al., *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, refers to this work as *Untitled (Skull)*.

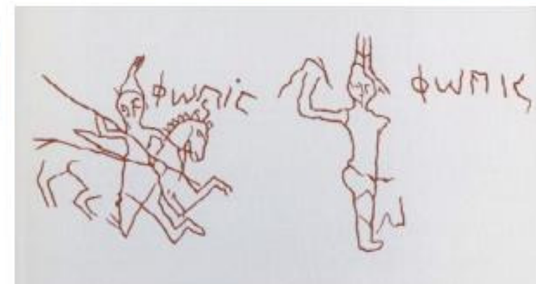
7. Alain Jouffroy, "Le Grand Journal de guerre de Jean-Michel Basquiat/The



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Left Entrance Hall), 1986
Pencil, oil paintstick,
and gouache on paper
42 x 30 inches
106.7 x 76.2 cm







Upper from left to right
Cave, Tadrat, Algeria,
reproduced in *African Rock Art,*
by David Coulson and Alec
Campbell, 2001, Harry N. Abrams

Cave, Mashonaland, Zimbabwe,
reproduced in
African Rock Art,
by David Coulson and Alec
Campbell, 2001, Harry N. Abrams

Lower right
Illustration from *African Rock Art,*
by Burchard Brentjes, 1969,
J. M. Dent and Sons Limited

Great War-Time Journal of Jean-Michel Basquiat," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Histoire d'une œuvre/The Work of a Lifetime*. Paris: Fondation Dina Vierny–Musée Maillol, 2003, page 27.

8. Barnett Newman, "The Sublime Is Now" (1948), in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill. New York: Knopf, 1990, page 173.

9. The work was titled *Acque Pericolose* on the back of canvas by the artist. The subtitle, *Poison Oasis* (not assigned by the artist), has accompanied the work since its execution. While this subtitle does not necessarily reflect an incorrect interpretation of the painting, it is certainly not a literal translation of the title given by the artist; a literal translation would be "Dangerous Waters."

10. The conclusion that the image is a self portrait is supported by comparing this figure to that depicted in another work painted at precisely this same time. *Arroz con Pollo* represents the artist and his girlfriend from this period, Suzanne Mallouk. In both *Arroz con Pollo* and *Acque Pericolose*, the male figure is seen as X-rayed, simultaneously revealing corporeal volume and skeletal underpinnings. *Arroz con Pollo* is one of only two works executed by the artist depicting a pair of male and female figures. Further establishing the identity of the figures in *Arroz con Pollo* is the 1982 drawing *Self Portrait with Suzanne*, the only other work in which the artist depicts a pair of male and female figures.

11. An analysis of the numerous depictions of heads of male figures with a circular or oblong form on top, with lines running away from or transecting its circumference, makes it clear that the artist's intent was the depiction of a halo or nimbus and not, as has been suggested, a crown of thorns. In fact, there is no example of the artist using the symbolic crown of thorns in any of his works. Rather, these radiating lines indicate rays of light, associated with illumination or realization. If there is an example of the nimbus actually having a dual function, including the representation of a crown of thorns, it may possibly be in the contemporaneous painting *Arroz con Pollo*, where the artist has depicted himself offering the fruits of his labor to his mate, who reciprocates by offering her breast for feeding.

12. As further evidence of Basquiat's specific association of the crown with spiritual transcendence, it is noteworthy that the silkscreen print *Back of the Neck* (1983, 57 1/2 x 103 inches, edition of twenty-four, published by New City Editions, Venice, California; reproduced in *Jean-Michel Basquiat*. New York: Vrej Baghoomian, 1989, pl. 69), includes a handpainted gold crown hovering over the figure's deconstructed torso. The inclusion of the words BACK OF THE NECK refers not simply to human anatomy but, as the Leonardo da Vinci scholar Carlo Pedretti has noted, to "the seat of the soul" (in conversation with Annina Nosei, November 17, 2003, concerning Basquiat's interest in Leonardo).

13. The author would like to acknowledge the comments of Lenore Schorr in helping to establish this conclusion. Herbert and Lenore Schorr acquired this work from the artist soon after it was completed. When asked if she had previously recognized and interpreted the image of the flashlight, Lenore acknowledged that she, too, had not considered it before. Upon reflection, she quickly saw it as a flashlight and as the artist's understanding of the importance of the mind. As she put it, "For Jean, everything of value was in the mind" (conversation with the author, December 19, 2003).

14. Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*. New York: Random House, 2003, page 104.

15. The characterization of a body of artworks produced in 1981 as *Cityscapes* is the author's. These works include *Untitled*, 1981, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 80 x 112 inches, collection of Annina Nosei; *Untitled*, 1981, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 80 x 80 inches, collection of Herbert and Lenore Schorr; and *Untitled*, 1981, acrylic, oil paintstick, and spray paint on canvas, 86 x 104 inches, the Brant Foundation, Greenwich, Connecticut.

16. The artist did not title this work. The subtitle *Self Portrait* was given by the Annina Nosei Gallery, which sold the work.

17. The author acknowledges L. Emmerling, *Basquiat*. Cologne: Taschen, 2003, p. 54; and the comments of Annina Nosei in interviews with the author, November 2003, January 2004, and March 2004.

18. Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali in 1964.

19. Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor*, ed. Eugene Kennedy. Novato, California, New World Library, 2001, page 27.

20. The discussion of this work in Emmerling, *Basquiat*, pp. 38 and 41, was considered by this author.

21. *Notary* contains two sheets of the five-part silkscreen *Untitled (From Leonardo)*, which were collaged onto the canvas. The five-part silkscreen (each sheet 34 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches, printed on Okawara rice paper in an edition of 40) was produced at New City Editions, Venice, California, in 1983. It is unclear whether the artist collaged into the painting unsigned trial proofs or signed and editioned copies of the print.

22. Richard Marshall was the first writer to identify the source of the artist's use of this word. (*Jean-Michel Basquiat*, The Whitney Museum, New York, 1994, p. 23.) While Emmerling's argument that Notary addresses the artist's new position as the vulnerable and almost helpless creator of financial value is relevant, other aspects of his argument are less convincing.

23. Burchard Brentjes, *African Rock Art*, trans. Anthony Dent. New York: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1970, pages 88–89.

24. Given the artist's work and residency in Italy in 1981, as well as his frequent travels in Europe throughout his adult life, it would not be unusual for him to give this work an Italian title. As a further indication of the artist's interest in Italian titling of his work, another painting from the same time was given the title *In Italian*.

25. The same floral patterning occurs in *The Nile*, painted at the same time.

26. Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1993, pp. 144–145.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers) (detail), 1982
Acrylic, spray paint, oil paintstick, tar and feather on wood
Polyptych: 108 x 92 inches
275.5 x 233.5 cm

CHAPTER 4

THE BLACK MALE: HEROIC IMAGES, SYMBOLS, AND IDENTITY

I promised Dave I'd never use the phrase "fuck nigga"
He said "think about what you saying: "fuck niggas"
No better than Samuel on D'Jango
No better than a white man with slave boats
Sound like I needed some soul searching
My pops gave me some game in real person
Retraced my steps on what they never taught me
Did my homework fast before government caught me
So I'ma dedicate this one verse to Oprah
On how the infamous, sensitive N-word control us
So many artists gave her an explanation to hold us
Well this is my explanation straight from Ethiopia
N-E-G-U-S definition: royalty; King royalty—wait listen
N-E-G-U-S description: Black emperor, King, ruler, now let me finish
The history books overlook the word and hide it
America tried to make it into a house divided
The homies don't recognize we been using it wrong
So I'ma break it down and put my game in a song
N-E-G-U-S, say it with me
Or say no more. Black stars can come and get me
Take it from Oprah Winfrey, tell her she right on time
Kendrick Lamar, by far, realist Negus alive

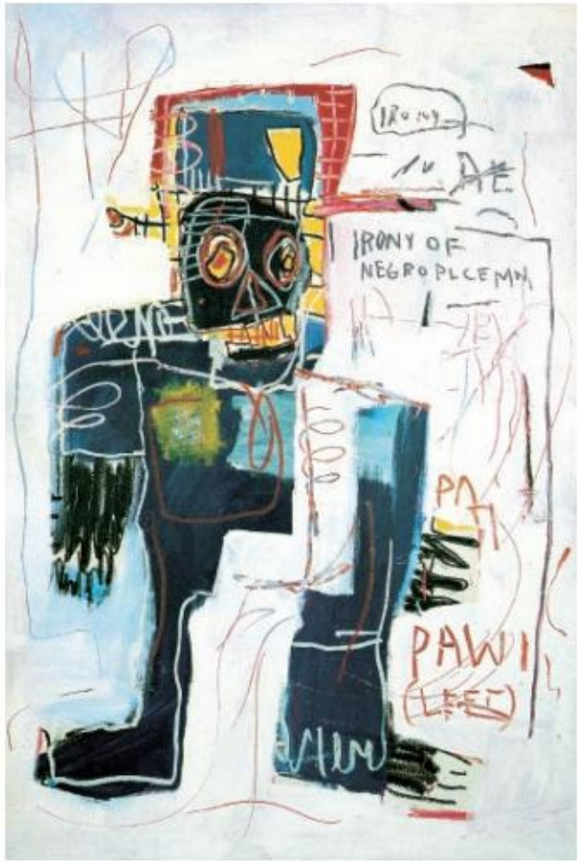
Kendrick Lamar[1]

A STANDING, BLACK MALE FIGURE WAS AN OFTEN-USED MOTIF in the paintings Jean-Michel Basquiat made in his first studio, in the basement of the Annina Nosei Gallery. These paintings include *Acque Pericolose* (1981), *Arroz con Pollo* (1981), *Untitled (Red Man)* (1981), *Per Capita* (1981), as well as the group of "work-engaged" figures. These works immediately found an enthusiastic audience. Soon after their completion, both *Acque Pericolose* and *Arroz con Pollo* were chosen for inclusion in the exhibition *Documenta 7*, which opened the following June in Kassel, Germany. At twenty years of age, Jean-Michel Basquiat was the youngest artist ever selected to show in this major international exhibition of contemporary art. While none of these works possesses the fully realized, heroic gestures and attributes of the standing black male figure that became the artist's central concern throughout 1982, they indicate that Basquiat entered his new studio with full understanding of where he intended to direct his artistic voice.

In 1982 Basquiat produced no fewer than fifty-two paintings, and thirty drawings, in which the main image is an iconic, black male figure. He also made twelve paintings, each depicting a black male figure, but rendered in red rather than black. In 1983 there are only five such paintings. From 1984 through the remainder of the artist's life there are very few examples of this subject. While in later works Basquiat painted the black man as an African king or divinity figure, the image of a black male referencing the artist's own culture and/or himself is primarily the subject of the formative years 1981–82.

Acque Pericolose is one of Basquiat's earliest depictions of a black male; the first figure with heroic attributes appears a few months later in 1981 in the artist's *Per Capita*. The figure is larger than life size, positioned in the center of the canvas, striding forward out of a landscape/cityscape. It is illuminated from two sources: by the flame of a torch that he holds upright in his left hand, and from a radiating nimbus over his head. The torch is a proclamation of victory, a triumphant gesture; the nimbus bestows the majesty of a champion.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Three, the black male figure of *Per Capita* refers to a specific hero, Cassius Clay, and even a certain moment in time, the 1960 Olympic Games. Basquiat must have recognized that the basic attributes of heroism assigned to this figure could be applied to the depiction of many different types of figures. Thus, within a few months the artist produced a wide array of images of a black male, all conveying heroic attributes. In the majority of these works the figure is full length and cen-



From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Irony of Negro Policeman, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
72 x 48 inches
183 x 122 cm

Untitled (Baptism), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick,
and paper collage on canvas
92 x 92 inches
233.5 x 233.5 cm

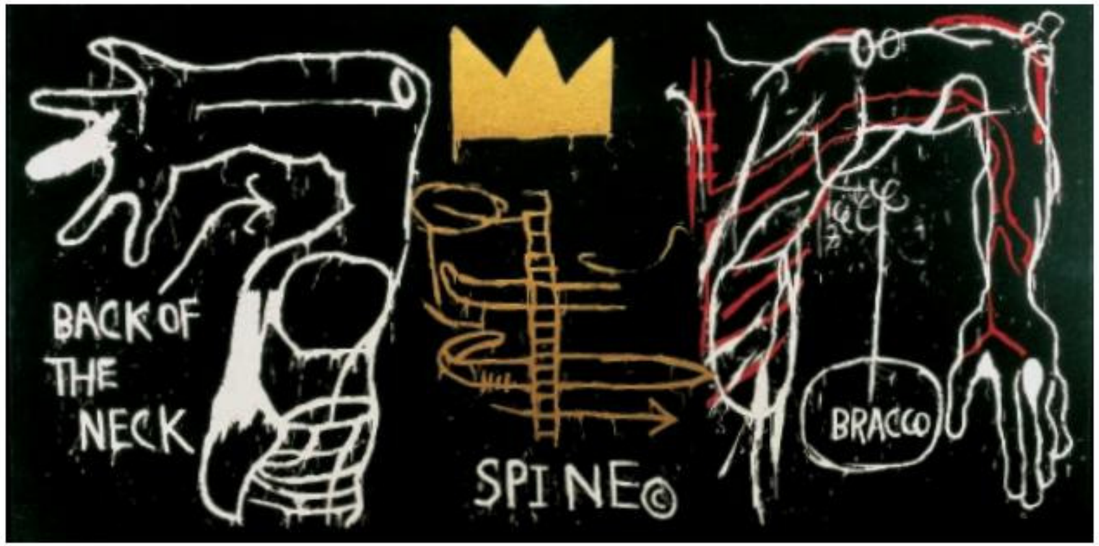
trally positioned. There are some important examples in which the figure is only torso and head. The most iconic, however are the full figures in which the basic features of the human anatomy are represented. Most of these works share similar facial features of prominent eyes and an elongated, toothy mouth.

Portraying his figures with upraised arms, the artist gives them a victorious moment in their heroism. In most of these paintings and drawings, the arm from shoulder to elbow extends horizontally while the forearm rises vertically at the elbow. There are others in which one arm is positioned straight overhead while the other extends down toward the ground. When both arms are raised up straight, such as in *Humidity* (1982), *Palm Springs Jump* (1982), and *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump* (1982), the figures seem to be physically reacting to something, as if part of a narrative. In *Untitled (Baptism)* (1982), the raised arms suggest an act of devotion or surrender. There are also depictions of the black male in which neither arm is raised. While heroism is not specifically suggested by arm gesture in *Untitled (Black Figure)* (1982), the size of the figure, filling the entire vertical length of the canvas, suggests a dominant physical presence.

Some of the artist's most accomplished examples of the heroic black male are *Self Portrait* (1982) (p. 141),[7] *Profit 1* (1982), and *Untitled (Boxer)* (1982) (p. 137). While each of these works alludes to heroism in the placement and size of the figure, each also expresses this attribute in a different manner. *Self Portrait*, executed soon after the completion of *Per Capita*, presents a full-length black male against a white-grey landscape. Asserting his presence, the figure holds an arrow in his raised left hand. Basquiat portrays this figure with dreadlocks, certainly identifying himself with it. The figure is solitary, and seems to have left behind his familiar world. He has a new power, a triumphant and powerful black voice.

As Basquiat increasingly focused on the black male, he turned to images of himself, always attempting to more deeply understand his own engagement with the world. Self portraiture became one of the artist's primary means of exploring this. We can identify more than twenty-five self portraits created in 1982. While *Self Portrait* may be the most recognized example, there are others of equal importance: *Self Portrait as a Heel*, (1982); *Self Portrait as a Heel, Part Two* (1982); *Self Portrait*, (1982); *Dos Cabezas* (1982), depicting the artist and Andy Warhol; the original 1982–83 painting/drawing on paper mounted on canvas used for the large black and white silk screen *Untitled* (1983); the five frenetically charged, large scale, untitled 1982 drawings, each of which depicts the artist (one a double portrait of the artist and Suzanne Malouk); and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* (1982). Whether it was a life-like resemblance or a more generic rendering of a highly emotive young black man, each of these portrayals shows the artist scrutinizing himself both physically and psychologically. While heroism was often the subject of Basquiat's self portraits, he also focused on his alienation. Those paintings are the work of an artist looking back at himself—as well as us—from the distance of an other being.

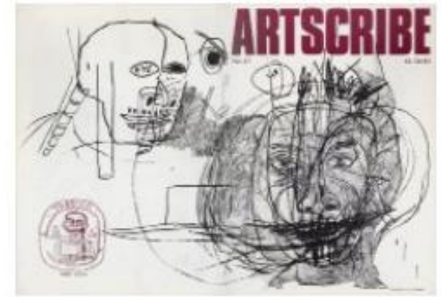
From self portraiture, Basquiat turned to an exploration of the human being's physical composition, primarily focusing on bones, organs, the brain, and blood circulation. He penetrated and exposed what lies beneath the surface, like an x-ray. He referred to classic texts such as *Gray's*



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Back of the Neck, 1983
Silkscreen and hand coloring
on Supra 100 paper
Edition of 24
50 1/4 x 101 inches
128 x 259 cm

Anatomy, a book he first encountered at the age of seven when his mother gave him a copy while he was recuperating in the hospital from the removal of his spleen, and the work of Leonardo da Vinci, clearly the most acclaimed artistic precedent for the young artist's own explorations. Basquiat's interest in our physical nature became a central aspect of his creative production; he produced many paintings and works on paper portraying human anatomy. Paintings such as *Catharsis* (1983), *Jesse* (1983), *Portrait of VRKS* (1982), *Notary* (1983), *Untitled (Hand Anatomy)* (1982), and several of the artist's few print editions (including *Back of the Neck* (1983), *Untitled (From Leonardo)* (1983) and *Academic Study of the Male Torso* (1983), illustrate the artist's interest in exposing the interior cavities of a human being. The human hand and arm were particularly fascinating to him. The hand is one of the more specific parts of the human anatomy by which internal expression is transmitted; Basquiat saw the hand as a surrogate for himself. Between 1982 and 1984 there are possibly one hundred works depicting the human hand and arm. In portraying his hand, Jean-Michel Basquiat made the same declaration of his presence as he did representing his head or entire body. When asked by the English magazine *Artscribe*[3] to produce a special project in conjunction with the artist's first museum exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh in 1984, Basquiat executed for the centerfold a black and white drawing of a figure whose foreshortened hands reach out toward the viewer. In these hands, Jean-Michel Basquiat represents the "doer" through which the artwork is realized. Basquiat's subject is neither individual physiognomy nor personality, but a simple statement "here I am."

One of Basquiat's more unusual works enlightens this observation. One night in late 1983, I was awakened by a call from the artist, at LAX on his way back to New York from Maui. He had several hours before his flight, and I quickly made my way to the airport to retrieve him. We went to my production studio in Venice, where he noticed some stacks of a material called ColorCore® produced by the Formica Corporation. At that time I was using this paper laminate in the production of a group of artworks called *Fish Lamps* with Frank Gehry. Basquiat asked if he could use a sheet of the material as a surface to paint on. He chose a 4 x 8 foot sheet. Because the edges of the material were sharp, I offered him a pair of thick leather safety gloves. Basquiat responded with a smile, and proceeded to draw the safety gloves in magic marker, followed by



writing the words SAFETY GLOVES inside a rectangular box. After a few minutes of reflection, he painted an image of his hand next to the drawing of the gloves. After adding a small patch of the same brown paint used to render his hand, he added the words RAW SIENNA. He then put on the safety gloves and proceeded to aggressively tear around the gloves and hand images, creating two separate, irregularly shaped surfaces. He held both sheets up in front of him, claiming a personal connection with his creation.

Above left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Artscribe No. 47, July–August 1984
Top: cover and back (folded out)
Bottom: centerfold

Above right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Acrylic and magic marker pen
on Colorcore®
42 x 61 inches
104 x 155 cm

Jean-Michel Basquiat gave this work to me that night, just before I took him to the airport. I contemplated it over the following days. At the time I don't think I fully understood what he had created. I put it away for several years. When I looked at it again, I then mounted and framed the work and hung it in my home. Only then did I realize that this deceptively simple work was a self portrait.

In the rough safety gloves, Basquiat saw a life lived by the rules and restrictions of society. Basquiat's image of his own hand was a declaration of his freedom, his independence, and his ability to create his own reality. Again, Basquiat turned to the representation of the hand to articulate how individual expression is held in balance by the realities of the world.

Three paintings show the range of Basquiat's images of the heroic black male. In *Profit I* (1982) (p. 136), Basquiat's figure is neither full-length nor completely black. Torso and arms are executed primarily in red, with traces of spray painted black lines crossing over broad passages of red paint. An act of reverence or devotion is suggested by the figure's bent, upraised arms. Against a nearly all-black background incised with graffiti-like scrawls and marks, Basquiat's figure stands in solitude, with a glowing golden yellow nimbus behind his head. *Untitled (Boxer)* (1982) (p. 137) presents a broad-chested black male figure with boxing gloves on raised hands. In contrast to *Per Capita*, and like Basquiat's two other boxer paintings, these images do not refer to specific historical figures. Rather, they are the expression of the black man's physical and spiritual attributes. *Untitled (Baptism)* (1982) (p. 131), diverges significantly from this iconography. One figure raises both arms, the other's

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Price of Gasoline in the Third World, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas
Diptych: 60 x 120 inches
152.5 x 305 cm

arms are at his side, and he has a nimbus over his head. The work has most often been interpreted as a baptism. Even if this is correct, it is probably not a portrayal of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, but a more metaphorical expression of purification as a transformation of self.

While he was painting the fully rendered black male, Jean-Michel Basquiat introduced an alternative representation of this subject. *Untitled (LA Painting)* (pp. 146-147), (1982), *Santo Versus Second Avenue* (1982), *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)* (1982) (p. 128), and *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* (1982) (p. 54) each include black males. In these works, however, the figure is not filled out and muscular, but a thin stick figure. Those in *Untitled (LA Painting)* and *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* are drawn in black, while in *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)* the figures are drawn in white, on a black ground. In all of these, the figure is constructed of thin, vertical lines for the legs and torso, intersected with horizontal lines representing arms. While some appear to represent a specific personage, many of these figures are characterless, with head rendered in a simple circle out of which radiate short, vertical lines. The combination of circle and line indicate head and hair as well as a nimbus encircling the head. There are variations on this schema, such as the two figures in *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)*, whose torsos and arms have been over-painted, one in pink, one in yellow. In *Untitled* (1982), the figure's face has been fully rendered, with highly expressive eyes and mouth. In many of these works and especially in *Untitled (LA Painting)* (1982) and *Untitled* (1982), the black male figures are accompanied by bird-like stick figures, also minimally rendered. What distinguishes human from bird are more densely drawn lines that take on the characteristic of wings rather than arms.

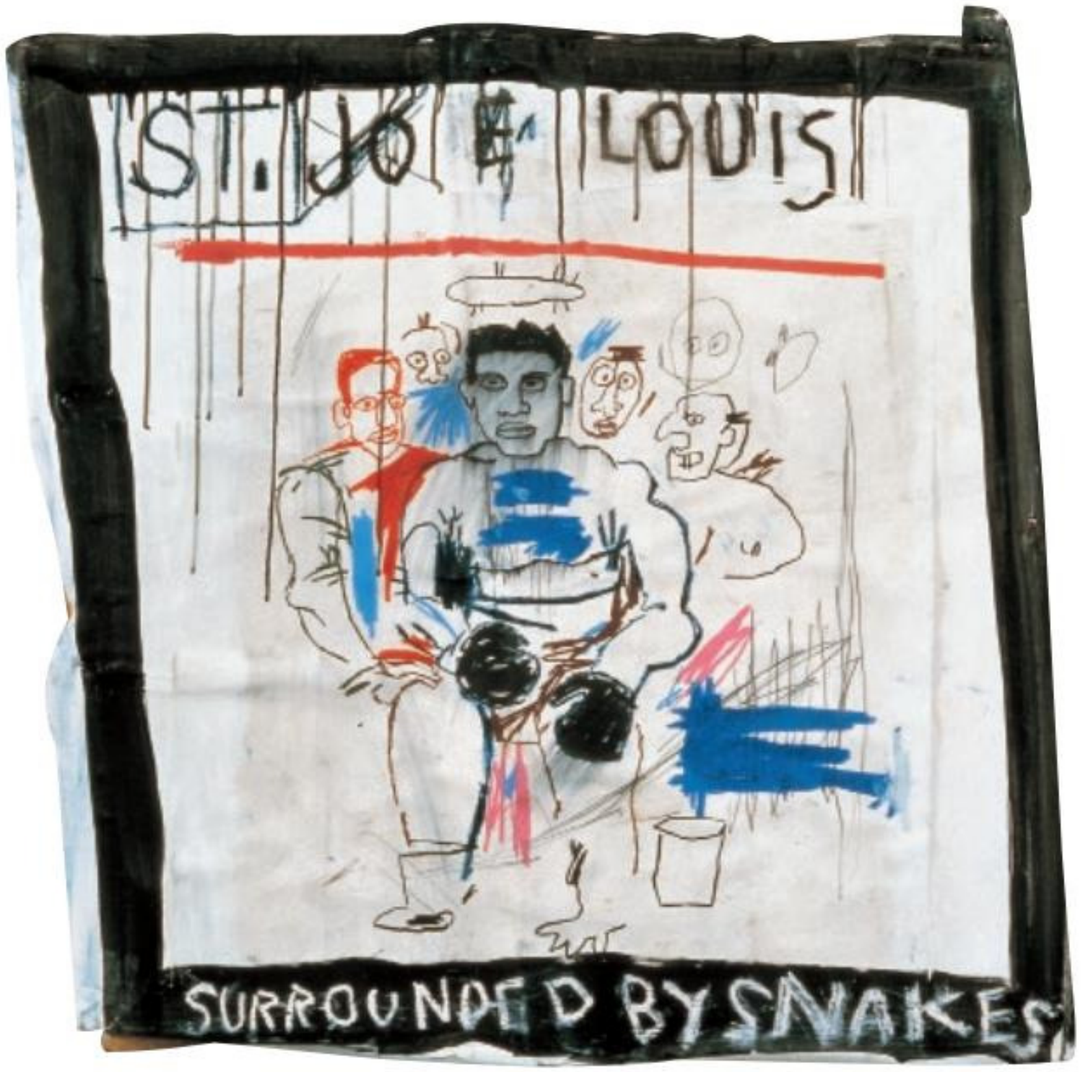
Bird-like creatures, and those with more realistic human legs, arms and torso, merit some additional consideration. Both figure types indicate the artist's fascination with the attenuation of the figure. Basquiat's long, thin forms suggest floating, soaring, or an out-of-body experience. These images are euphoric, in an ecstatic state. Freed from worldly constraint, whether human or bird, they are an expression of freedom.

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Profit 1, 1982
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
87 x 157 inches
221 x 399 cm

Untitled (Boxer), 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on linen
76 x 94 inches
193 x 239 cm

The Price of Gasoline in the Third World (1982) (pp. 134-135) depicts no fewer than fifteen black figures, all but two clearly human. Many are more fully rendered than the stick figures of *Untitled (LA Painting)* and *Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers)*; each achieved with a series of quick, straight lines, rather than passages of paint conveying physical weight or density. In *Price of Gasoline in the Third World*, many of the figures are drawn on paper collaged onto the canvas picture support. Whether creature or human, minimally rendered or clothed, with upraised arm, weapon or tool, each figure is proud and self-assured. *The Price of Gasoline in the Third World* may be viewed as a summation of the stick-figure versions of the black male. As the figures presented in the picture move across a large horizontal pictorial field, the work loosely implies the unfolding of an event or narrative. If the work's iconography remains elusive, it nonetheless was an important painting for the artist. Basquiat executed this painting in his Venice studio, and in contrast to most of the other works painted there, he hung the completed painting for many months in his living space where he and his guests would admire and study it. [4]

It is often thought that Basquiat's stylized line figures on a shallow ground reflect the artist's youthful engagement with comic books and cartoons. But their inspiration was something quite different. Books about ancient rock art



Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
St. Joe Louis Surrounded by Snakes, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas
40 x 40 inches
101.5 x 101.5 cm

found in Africa and North America inspired Jean-Michel Basquiat (p. 127). In the petroglyphs carved into rock (as opposed to pictographs painted onto rock), he discovered a pictorial language that he could readily apply to his salutation of the black male. In African rock art, the young artist found many examples of sensitively rendered figurative imagery. He was attracted to the stacking and repetition of multiple images that gave the impression of figures floating and weightless.

The prehistoric rock artist carved his narrative on solid rock surfaces, often the wall of a cave or rock overhang, now still visible centuries after their creation. With the patina of age, these images are voices from the distant past. The makers of these ancient figural images were not "regular" tribesman, they were shamans, distinguished for their insight resulting from having entered into ecstatic states. The images they chose to depict were archetypal. They reflect their makers understanding of basic, fundamental truths which they came to know from having partaken of rituals, ceremonies and hallucinations that they would enter into in order to gain insight into the truths and exigencies of their tribe. These images became a fundamental means for the spiritual guide to impart to his tribesmen a sense of self as they faced the myriad of uncertainties in their world.[5]

Jean-Michel Basquiat was drawn to these images from

Right
GIANFRANCO GORGONI
Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1982

Top left
Tassili N'Ajjer, Algeria, reproduced in *African Rock Art*, by David Coulson and Alec Campbell, 2001, Harry N. Abrams

Right
DOGON PEOPLES (Mali)
Standing Male Figure
Wood
Height: 82 7/8 inches. 210.5 cm

Below
ELEMA PEOPLES (Papua New Guinea)
Eharo mask (detail), 20th century
Barkcloth, plant fiber, wood, human hair, feathers, and paint wood and patina
Height: 86 inches, 218.4 cm

books, and from objects on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History. Basquiat was not only esthetically interested in these artworks, they inspired him. Whether he fully or even correctly understood their original intent, Basquiat saw the makers of these images functioning in the same capacity as how he saw himself. Turning to these prehistoric sources, the young artist sought to convey his insight, much as he believed the original rock artists did hundreds of years earlier. In prehistoric rock imagery, Basquiat found an inspiration for his own challenge to turn his art into an expression of man's condition in his world. As Robert Farris Thompson profoundly noted, "all of Basquiat's work is an autobiographical search for wholeness."[6]

Basquiat also looked to sub-Saharan African art and even the art of Papua, New Guinea, for the stylistic origins of his black males with upraised arms, and oversized heads with eyes and mouth wide open. In contrast to the ecstatic stick-figure imagery, his full-bodied black figures were inspired by African sculpture. When he was a child, his mother often took him to the Metropolitan Museum of

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Self Portrait, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on linen
76 x 94 inches
193 x 239 cm

Modern Art. His inspirations there from works he must have seen are very obvious, in particular the remarkable Dogon sculpture of a standing male figure with upraised arms on permanent display in the Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection:

> "The most distinctive subject rendered by Dogon sculpture is that of a single figure standing with raised arms. This posture has usually been interpreted as a gesture of prayer—an effort to link earth and heavens. This masterpiece of Dogon figurative art depicts a man with a well-modeled body in a naturalistic stance. The artist has carefully rendered the figure's musculature, anatomical detail, and body ornament. His stylized beard identifies him as an elder and an individual whose age and experience entitle him to participate in the most important religious, political, and social affairs of Dogon society."[7]

In African rock art there are also images of figures with upraised arms, but unlike the Dogon sculptures, they are almost always in postures suggesting forms in movement, including dancing, running, even possibly swimming.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Eyes and Eggs, 1983
Acrylic and collage
on cotton dropcloth
Diptych: 119 x 97 inches
302.5 x 246.5 cm

Basquiat's male figures with upraised arms are static, frontally positioned and fully rendered. African rock art images are highly stylized and characterless, like his stick-like depictions of the black male. When Basquiat wanted to realize a major canvas depicting a fully rendered black male with upraised arms, he turned to the more authoritative examples of African sculpture, which he had seen himself. The "orans" posture is an established iconography in Western religious painting, describing a figure standing with elbows close to the sides of the body, hands raised, palms facing up. Unlike its iconography in Western art, in African sculpture figures with this posture are almost always male. While one may find examples of fully extended arms in Christian imagery, it is much more common to find them slightly bent. In contrast, in African sculpture the arms are usually straight. This is a significant difference, which Basquiat would have recognized. In Western art, a figure with bent arms symbolizes a gesture of humility or an act of submission. It is this bent arm gesture that Basquiat uses in *Baptism* (1982) (p. 131). The African male figure with upraised arms is an ecstatic, triumphant gesture, an acknowledgment of the connection between man and the unknown.[8] The African iconography represents power and authority, both of prime importance to a young black man coming into his own in a predominantly white art world in New York City.

Basquiat's "warriors" are sometimes pictured with spears or arrows, symbolizing battle. But his imagery portrays a state of ecstasy rather than confrontation. His black man's victory is as much a victory for the soul as for the body. The upraised arms are an expression of a higher purpose, insight into one's true nature. Jean-Michel Basquiat's figure is an expression of an internally achieved victory and self-acceptance.

For Jean-Michel Basquiat, the iconography of African sculpture also resonated in a personal way. The gesture of upraised arms traditionally symbolized the acknowledgement of a higher power or being, and a connection between worldly existence and a higher force or spirit. He was drawn to the African figures with upraised arms for slightly different reasons. As a visitor to the Metropolitan Museum he was attracted to the acclaimed cultural objects of his race. To him, Dogon sculpture was an expression of the very attributes he sought to convey in his own works. These figures represented the heroic power of the warrior, the hunter, the progenitor, and protector. They became the artist's means of conveying a newly claimed stature for both himself and his crew.

There is a significantly different depiction of the black male in *Eyes and Eggs* (1983),[9] one of the larger works in the artist's oeuvre. It portrays a short-order cook named Joe whom Basquiat knew in New York in the early 1980s. Almost ten feet in height in the painting, Joe, with giant, wide open, piercing eyes, faces directly toward the viewer. He is identified with his profession by the paper chef's hat he wears, and he holds a frying pan containing two eggs, hot off the grill, which he raises in his right hand. Because the image of Joe has specific socio-economic references, it would seem to be different from those images clearly derived from African sculptural sources. Yet this image seems as heroic as those works with more traditional iconographic references, and possibly was inspired by similar sources. While Joe holds only a cooking pan in his hand, his gesture contains the same power and conviction that Basquiat conveyed in those figures relating to African art. Here again, as in the series of paintings depicting a single male figure in an act of labor, such as *Irony of The Negro Policeman* (1981), *Untitled* (1981), depicting a fisherman and *Untitled* (1981), showing a standing figure with rake, Basquiat links work with heroism. ■

Notes

1. "I," Track 15 on *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Written by Christopher Jasper, Ernie Isley, Kendrick Lamar, Marvin Isley, Rahki, Ronald Isley and Rudolf Isley. Top Dawg Entertainment and Aftermath Entertainment, distributed by Interscope Records, 2015. This text from *Genius.com*.

2. Having never had the opportunity to examine this painting, the author is assuming that the picture is titled on back.

3. *Artscribe*, # 47. London, July-August 1984. Jean-Michel Basquiat illustrated front and back covers and four-page centerfold.

4. The author specifically recalls this work hanging in the living room area of the ground floor space where Jean-Michel Basquiat worked and lived at the Larry Gagosian residence on Market Street in Venice. This work was executed later than the other paintings with stick-like black male figures, all of which were made in New York prior to the artist's residency in Venice in late 1982 through spring 1983.

5. These conclusions are taken from some of the many interpretations of African rock art imagery. Specifically, the author cites *Wikipedia* (Rock Art: Background, Types, Interpretation (Relation to Shamanism).

6. Geldzahler, *Interview* magazine, January 1983, pages 44-46.

7. Metmuseum.org. Standing Man (Mali; Dogon peoples)/ Work of Art/ Timeline of Art History.

8. The female figure with both arms upraised is also found in sub-Saharan African sculpture. An example is the proto-Dogon female figure, Djenne Empire, Mali, circa 900–1030 AD. An excellent example is reproduced in Sotheby's auction catalogue, *The Collection of Allan Stone: African, Oceanic and Indonesian Art*, Vol I, lot number 40. (New York, 15 November 2013).

9. While this work is dated 1983, the painting was painted in New York and shipped unstretched to the artist in Los Angeles, where the author arranged for it to be stretched. The work was included in the artist's 1983 exhibition with Larry Gagosian in West Hollywood. Given that the artist resided in Los Angeles between November 1982 and the March 8, 1983 opening of his exhibition, there is the strong likelihood that the work was executed in 1982.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Brother's Sausage (detail), 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 187 1/2 inches
122 x 476 cm

CHAPTER 5

MULTIPLE-PANEL NARRATIVE PAINTING: THE FREEDOM AND LIBERATION PICTURES

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF FROM HIS contemporaries in the creation of a group of multiple-panel paintings with thematic content. In these works, an underlying subject matter begins to unfold as the viewer takes in and links together imagery, words and texts presented in the multiple panels. While this type of painting has a rich history in Western art, very few modern, and particularly contemporary, artists made it a point of interest. Traditionally used as a viable means of conveying themes and subject matter in religious and history painting, it rarely found application in the twentieth century.

The pictures we are presently examining are composed of multiple panels attached together, forming one continuous picture surface. Distinguishing this small group of paintings, the content presented on one panel is often not continued onto the next. The subject matter of each picture becomes more apparent as the eye scans back and forth over multiple panels. While Basquiat used images, words, and phrases with social, cultural and historical references, he was not concerned with providing the viewer a clear, precise, and predictable "road map" by which to decipher his multiple-panel pictures. Nor do these pictures always tell a story. They allude to specific themes and subjects, leaving the viewer to search deeper in order to discern his point of view.

As an introduction to Basquiat's multiple-panel narrative pictures, we start with a painting with no multiple panels. *Untitled (LA Painting)*[1] depicts a number of flying winged figures and interspersed arrows floating across a multicolored pictorial field. Offsetting this expanse of space, the artist has collaged drawings of human heads and partial figures on the picture's surface. Further energizing the painting, Basquiat has spray-painted abstract gestures sporadically across the picture surface. These passages of spray paint result in a schism in our reading of the work. Basquiat's figurative images and symbols impart the impression of the markings, inscriptions and remains of a past culture. They again bring to mind Basquiat's fascination with the graffiti-like images carved into rock by nomadic North African tribesmen dating back to the early years of the Christian Era. In contrast, his "tags" feel contemporary. *Untitled (LA Painting)* feels both very old and very new. It hovers in some nether world, its meaning almost accessible, yet very mysterious.

Untitled (LA Painting) does not present historical references and a more defined subject like the multiple-panel pictures produced eighteen months later, in late 1982–83. This picture, from the formative months in Basquiat's career when he undertook his first major studio pictures for gallery exhibition, shares an important feature with the

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (LA Painting), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, spray paint and paper collage on canvas
67 x 206 inches
170 x 523.5 cm

later multiple-panel pictures—a new scale of picture making. More importantly, *Untitled (LA Painting)* introduced the underlying "world view" informing the later multiple-panel pictures: an expression of freedom and transcendence. *Untitled (LA Painting)* is a panorama with a group of hovering winged creatures in flight intermixed with fragments of the human figure. The repetition of arrows across the pictorial field signals that these bird-like creatures are in ascent, and that a transformative process is taking place. Creatures capable of transcending earth's gravity prevail; with their ascendance is an implied liberation from the forces binding human experience. Slightly right of center Basquiat added a stick-like human figure holding an upright sword in his hand. Engaged in some form of battle, this figure is the artist's representation of the human condition: struggle and conflict, weighed down, and restricted. In the left center portion of the picture the artist has drawn the word PESO, the Spanish word for "weight," and the only word in the work. Many of the bird-creatures have a nimbus or halo around their heads. They are represented as sacred, as though they are liberated. Having introduced two different types of figures which together capture the theme of duality, Basquiat would continue this exploration in greater depth with specific historical and social articulation in the multiple-panel paintings he made over the following eighteen months.

There are only a few art historical precedents in twentieth-century painting for Jean-Michel Basquiat's multiple-panel narrative paintings. Structurally, they are reminiscent of the triptych paintings of Francis Bacon.[2] Conceptually and philosophically, however, Bacon's triptychs differ significantly from the work of the younger artist. Bacon's multiple-panel paintings often imply the passage of time or some form of transformation. The relationship of one image to an adjoining one suggests a process of change—whether physical or psychological. It is unclear whether we are witness to different states of an individual's persona or the representation of a continuous action unfolding over an undetermined period of time. In either case, the combined images convey some form of narrative description. The viewer becomes the witness to an event. Bacon's triptych paintings are compelling because the artist's chosen format creates a unique psychological theater.

Jean-Michel Basquiat chose the multiple-panel picture format in order to draw attention to aspects of black culture in the United States which a predominately white society had disregarded or failed to recognize. Basquiat's paintings imply neither the passage of time nor the progression of an event. As Bacon employed the multiple-panel format in order to explore man's inner psychology, Basquiat used a similar format to present a layering of facts and observations, ultimately calling into question inherent, fundamental human rights.

Jean-Michel Basquiat executed six multiple-panel paintings from late in 1982, continuing throughout 1983. These works are *The Dutch Settlers* (1982); *Frogmen* (1983); *Brothers Sausage* (1983); *Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola* (1983); *Life Like Son of Barney Hill* (1983), and *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* (1983). Each of these works comprises five to nine canvases, some joined with small hinges placed across the top. While not conceived as a series, these closely-related works share several common features. As noted, what Basquiat presents in one panel often feels at odds with the next. In most of these works the eye does not move from section to section without the feeling of disruption. It is almost as if Basquiat has intentionally placed brakes on the viewer's engagement. Understanding the artist's intent only unfolds with repeated viewing from panel to panel. These works share other common features. While *The Dutch Settlers* (1982) is executed entirely in acrylic paint, each of the other five multiple-panel pictures is composed from paint as well as collaged photocopies of original drawings on top of which the artist has painted. With the exception of *The Dutch Settlers*, each of these works is consciously structured as a balance between pictorial imagery and factual information in the form of

FRANCIS BACON
Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, c. 1944
Oil on three boards
Each: 37 x 29 inches
94 x 73.7 cm

words and short phrases. In some of these works Basquiat has included an entirely abstract panel.

Contemporaneous with the multiple-panel paintings Basquiat executed several important works of three stretched canvases. The formal structure of *Notary*, *The Nile*, *Mitchell Crew*, *Six Crimee* and *Catharsis* is significantly different from the multiple-panel pictures; they cannot be viewed and deciphered in the same manner. In these three-panel works, the structural composition is an overall pictorial field unfolding over three related, continuous surfaces. Notably, the juxtaposition of painted and collaged sections is not present in any of the three-canvas pictures, resulting in a different way to read the pictorial field. While there are examples of the same words and phrases appearing in both groups of works, and even some shared themes, the means of engagement of the six multiple panel narrative paintings is significantly different.[3]

As the subject matter of *The Nile* (1983) (pp. 58-59) shares a certain affinity with the multiple-panel narrative paintings executed in 1982–83, it merits our consideration.[4] In contrast to the majority of those pictures, *The Nile* does not exclusively focus on the subject of the black man in the United States. In this work, both images and texts link slavery in America (A SLAVE) to its cultural and historical roots in Africa. *The Nile* includes references to both ancient Egyptian culture (NUBA, MEMPHIS, THEBES, AMENHOTEP, A DOG GUARDING THE PHARAOH), as well as a less familiar mention of nomadic African culture (DUMARIS), which links *The Nile* to the painting *Notary* (discussed in Chapter 3 in this volume). These two works are the key paintings in which Basquiat alludes to the practices of the Blemyan tribe in the Sahara desert in the early Christian Era. This nomadic culture carved inscriptions, such as "Dumaris" onto the rock wall of a cave in order to notify others of their presence, to assert their identity. Unlike *Notary*, *The Nile* does not attempt to link historical aspects of black culture to the artist's portrayal of himself. *The Nile*, with the words TENNESSEE AND SICKLE, connects the black man in Egypt two thousand years ago to slavery in America.

Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola (1983) portrays two political figures who led populist movements that won them political power which was ultimately lost, resulting in their eventual imprisonment and death. Haitian by birth, Toussaint L'Overture (1743-1803) led a successful slave insurrection and helped the French expel the British from Haiti. After briefly heading the first black-led government in the Americas, he was overthrown and deported to France, where he died in prison. Savonarola (1452-1498), an Italian Dominican friar whose visionary prophecies helped to expel the ruling Medici family from Florence, was eventually excommunicated, imprisoned and hanged.

After gaining popular support from the people, both Toussaint and Savanarola were overthrown by a ruling authority. It remains unclear why Basquiat chose to join these two figures together. Clearly, Basquiat, not only an avid consumer of information but also deeply aware of his own Haitian heritage, would have been drawn to the life and history of Toussaint. The visionary nature of Savonarola's prophecies would have especially appealed to Basquiat. The artist's attraction to these two historical figures is made clear in two adjoining panels predominately filled with small, often obscured collaged words and figurative images. These texts are: POWER, MONEY, VALUE, FREEEDOM, LEECHES, STALIN, ROOSEVELT, THE FINAL BATTLE, JUSTICE, MALCOLM X, and LIBERTY. Many of these references mirror an aspect of the life or historical relevance of Toussaint and Savonarola.

It is interesting to note that many of the photocopied text drawings collaged in *Toussaint L'Overture Versus Savonarola* come from four of the thirty-two original drawings composing *The Daros Suite*. Basquiat chose passages from the drawings titled *Leeches*, *Replicas*, *Skin Head Wig* and *Liberty*. As previously noted, a central theme in several of the works in *The Daros Suite* is the power of authority challenging man as he strives for the realization of his vision. In his references to the lives of these two historical figures Basquiat alludes to their sacrifices in their pursuit of liberty and freedom. Basquiat turned to the past as he sought meaning for his own time. Facilitated by his newfound compositional structure, which afforded both the repetition of a text or reference to a subject, as well as a heightening of interest by juxtaposing seemingly unrelated subjects, Jean-Michel Basquiat found new and potent means to draw attention to his theme of freedom in the face of adversity.

At first, *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* (1983) reads as a cultural-social history of life in the deep South in the first part of the twentieth century. The painting contains the words NEGROES, MARK TWAIN, COTTON, MISSISSIPPI, THE DEEP SOUTH 1912-1936-1951, and UNDISCOVERED GENIUS OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA. It is Basquiat's textual reference to the "undiscovered genius of the Mississippi delta" with a portrait head above that turns this work into a specific history painting and a self-reflection

Right
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Pegasus' First Visit to America in the Shade of the Flatiron Building (Kabal American Zephyr), 1982
Solvent transfer, fabric collage, and acrylic on wood and metal support with flags, cardboard and electric fan
96 1/2 x 133 1/2 x 22 1/2 inches
245 x 339 x 57.2 cm

Following pages, top to bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Brother's Sausage, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 187 1/2 inches
122 x 476 cm

Fragmen, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 185 1/4 inches
122 x 470.5 cm

EST 1897
BROS
FAMOUS
SAUSAGE
BEEF, PORK, SALT WATER, CORN SYRUP SOLIDS, SODIUM NITRATE.
LIBERTY
1951
D

POLICE
ASBESTOS,
TIME/BROKEN
SIONESTIME.
MUSEUM
GUARDS
TWO PLY.
TWO-PLY

IN THE DEEP SOUTH
UNDISCOVERED GENIUS OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA
MISSISSIPPI
MARK TWAIN
MARK TWAIN
MARK TWAIN
VOBER
PER LB. 49¢
UDDER
NEGROES
NEGROES
NEGROES

SON OF BARNEY HILL?
SKIN HEAD WIG
VERSUS
SKIN HEAD WIG
EKI
LIBERTY
5¢
FIVE CENT

by the artist. The "undiscovered genius of the Mississippi delta" is well known to be Robert Leroy Johnson (May 8, 1911–August 16, 1938). Johnson, an American blues singer and musician, is considered a master of the blues. As an itinerant performer who played mostly on street corners and in juke joints, he had little commercial success. Nonetheless, his influence was monumental. Eric Clapton has called Robert Johnson the most important blues singer that ever lived. In his painting, Basquiat portrayed this legendary figure as an integral part of the history and culture of the South. Unlike many of the other multiple-panel paintings with one or more panels containing collaged texts, the words included in this work are much larger in scale and painted directly onto the canvas. Basquiat's words are the declarations of a young black man striving to illustrate the plight of his people.

This conclusion is supported by the drawing entitled *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta*, which Basquiat executed at approximately the same time as the painting, and is part of *The Daros Suite*. In fact, one of the texts included in the drawing states the drawing is a STUDY FOR THE UNDISCOVERED GENIUS OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA. The drawing includes many of the same textual references as the painting, but also provides a good deal more elaboration on how Basquiat saw aspects of life in the South. The drawing can be read as a simplified summation of the history of the black man from slave ship to the four corners of America, and the tools of his labor, sickles, mattocks, forks, and axes, as he supported the slave economy in the American South. But as much as the drawing is an indictment of the South and slavery, it was also Basquiat calling attention to the life of a musical genius whose artistic talents flourished in a society as much dictated by bondage as by freedom. The drawing includes six references, in both word and number, to "27," the age at which Johnson died. Having performed for most of his life on the street, it was only in his last three years that Johnson was actually recorded in a studio. In hindsight, additional consideration needs to be given to Basquiat's reference to "27" in his drawing. Jean-Michel Basquiat also died at the age of twenty-seven, almost fifty years to the day of Robert Leroy Johnson's death. While both the painting and the drawing can be seen as an astute reflection by the artist on his own culture and on one of his heroes, it may also be viewed as a prophecy of his own tragic end.

If *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* is an expression of the troubled early life of the musical genius Robert Leroy Johnson, *Life Like Son of Barney Hill* (1983) is more mysterious. The title of the work and text painted across two adjoining panels refers to the event in 1960 when African American social worker Barney Hill and his wife Betty claimed that they were abducted and taken on board a UFO. The themes of death and transcendence are asserted in the texts accompanying the large, one-eyed portrait head of Barney Hill. Next to the figure's right jaw, the artist has collaged the photocopied text LUX, LUCET IN TENEBRIS on the canvas. This same photocopy, appearing five times in the work, also includes the word ANUBIS. The first phrase, written in Latin and taken from the prologue of the *Gospel of Saint John*, translates to "the light was shining in the darkness;" the word "Anubis" refers to the Egyptian God of the Dead. These two references allude to two opposing forces—life and death. The placement of these texts next to the head of Barney Hill highlights the artist's fascination with this historical figure. Further clarifying Basquiat's intent, the adjoining panel shows a figure wearing a red cape with a large letter "S" in a downward pointing triangle inscribed across the figure's chest. Basquiat has repeated the symbolic Superman "S" in several other parts of the picture. Superman is in action, seemingly in flight. With his left arm fully extended, he projects power and authority. In the context of the imagery and text presented on the adjoining panel, Superman represents rising out of the darkness; and, as expressed on the furthest panel to the right, the realization of LIBERTY.

Basquiat saw Barney Hill's claim of abduction by unknown aliens, and his subsequent belittlement and complete rejection by society, as the saga of a man who was offered the possibility of experiencing a deeper realm of human experience, but was repeatedly pulled back into "reality" by those afraid of the unknown. In this work, Superman's power and strength is capable of guiding man back to his potential and dignity, and for Basquiat, Barney Hill became a manifestation of the choice between freedom and slavery.

One might wonder why Basquiat was interested in Barney Hill. While the story of this rather obscure African American social worker being abducted by aliens is rather unusual, I would suggest that it had a special attraction for the young artist. Barney Hill's supposed abduction occurred soon after the artist's birth. As Basquiat researched historical source material for inspiring subject matter, he was repeatedly drawn to themes consistent with his socio-political point of view that also reinforced his sense of self. It is not too ambitious to imagine that Jean-Michel Basquiat saw himself as "The Life Like Son of Barney Hill." ■

Previous pages, top to bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 184 inches
122 x 467.5 cm

Life Like Son of Barney Hill, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 205 1/2 inches
122 x 522 cm

Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Toussaint l'Overture Versus Savonarola, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 230 inches
122 x 584 cm

Notes

1. The author suggests that the subtitle of this painting was given to the work by the artist (in conversation with its first owner, Larry Gagosian) as a gesture of recognition of his first exhibition with the dealer. The subtitle is therefore much more about the venue for the exhibition than anything in the picture concerning the city of Los Angeles. The author dates this painting to the first months of 1982, and before most of the other large scale paintings of 1982 including *Profit 1*, *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump*, and *Untitled (Devil)*.

2. One needs to also recognize Robert Rauschenberg's later work in which different picture surfaces and objects are brought together to form one overall picture. Rauschenberg's works from the early 1980s, such as *Snowberry Fudge* (1980) or *Pegasus'First Visit to America in the Shade of the Flatiron Building* (1982), have a clear structural affinity to Basquiat's previously discussed multiple surface object-painting *Grillo*.

3. In addition, in 1983 Basquiat made a number of three-panel vertically-oriented paintings in which each of the panels is slightly separated from the next by wooden spacer bars on the back of each canvas. Examples of this body of work are *Charles the First*, *Fred*, *Quality Meats for the Public* and *Untitled* (Udo Branhorst collection).

4. The third edition of the quasi catalogue raisonné of the paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat (published by Galerie Enrico Navarra, Paris, in 2000 and updated in 2010) assigns the title of *El Gran Espectaculo (History of Black People)* to a painting signed, dated, and titled on the back as *The Nile*. The title *El Gran Espectaculo* was assigned to the work based on the text appearing at the top of the work's central panel. As with many of Basquiat's paintings, this title was given to the work by the collector who owned the painting at the time of the Navarra publication. What is interesting is the subtitle assigned by the previous owner, *History of Black People*, which reflects the collector's recognition and understanding of Basquiat as a key documentarian of American black culture.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Crown Hotel) (detail), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
48 x 85 inches
122 x 216 cm

CHAPTER 6

THE FEMININE

Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, men have named you
You're so like the lady with the mystic smile
Is it only 'cause you're lonely, they have blamed you
For that Mona Lisa strangeness in your smile?

Do you smile to tempt a lover, Mona Lisa?
Or is this your way to hide a broken heart?
Many dreams have been brought to your doorstep
They just lie there and they die there

Are you warm, are you real, Mona Lisa?
Or just a cold and lonely, lovely work of art?
Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa[1]

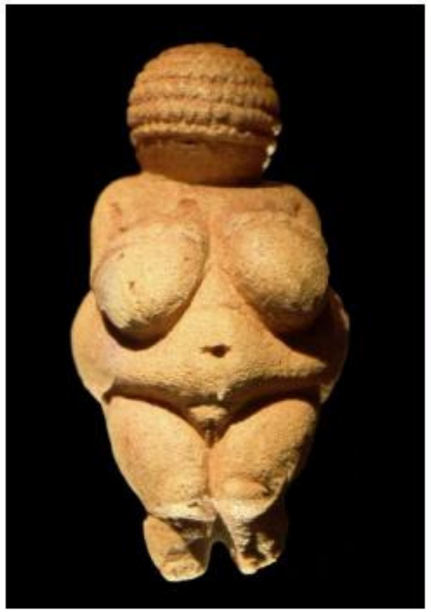
THERE ARE VERY FEW IMAGES OF THE FEMALE FIGURE IN THE oeuvre of Jean-Michel Basquiat. While there are many renderings of the male, including images of the human head and torso as well as an array of black, red and white standing figures, Basquiat portrayed a full-length female figure, in most cases in the nude, only nine times, in both painting and drawing.

The apparent scarcity of female imagery is not an indication of the artist's lack of interest in this subject. When Basquiat focused on the female form, he gave it his fullest consideration. Recognizing specific art historical precedents, Basquiat turned to the female form to portray fundamental human traits such as innocence and vulnerability.

Basquiat's female imagery is seen in his paintings *Untitled* (1981), *Arroz con Pollo* (1981), the drawing *Self Portrait with Suzanne* (1982), *Mater* (1982), *Venus* (1982), *Baby Boom* (1982), *Untitled* (1983), *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* (1983) and one collaborative painting with Andy Warhol, *6.99* (1985).

Two key works in the history of art inform Jean-Michel Basquiat's characterization of the feminine and his renderings of the female figure. In his early portrayals, he depicts his subjects with large, pendulous breasts hanging over a rounded stomach, which in turn rests on top of two broad, stylized legs. In reducing the figure to a simplified, almost naïf form, Basquiat pays tribute to Pablo Picasso's classically derived figurative images. Specifically, in Picasso's 1950 sculpture, *Pregnant Woman*, Basquiat might have found the source for his early representations of the female nude. The young New York painter could easily have been familiar with the older master's sculpture as the work was often on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In both Basquiat's earliest depictions of the female nude and in Picasso's sculpture, the female form presents both breasts and abdominal region as large, forward-projecting bulbous shapes. While Picasso was surely an inspiration for him, Basquiat also looked at something more ancient, the so-called "Venus figurines," the most famous of which is known as the *Venus of Willendorf*. Little is known about the meaning of these sculptures dating from the Paleolithic Period. They embody the female as the primordial force and sustainer of life. Basquiat's figures convey these same attributes. Breasts represent not only fertility, but also the ability to provide for those beings she brings into the world.

Perhaps inspired by the same pre-classical source, the female figure of *Arroz con Pollo* conveys corpulent physicality. Following closely after *Untitled, Arroz con Pollo* includes two interacting figures, thereby conveying a



narrative content. In the work, a nude female clutches her breast while a standing, larger than life-sized male figure with a nimbus over his head offers a freshly cooked chicken to her. While Basquiat's female appears to be crouching, she still has an assertive presence. This is in part the result of the way in which he has rendered the figure. Baquiat's female figure recalls aspects of both Picasso's proto-cubist figures of 1908 as well as his neo-classical imagery of the early 1920s. In regard to both sources, Basquiat saw the possibilities of abandoning a naturalistic portrayal in favor of a more simplified presentation of his subject. In so doing, Basquiat was able to bestow upon his sexually exposed, breast-bearing creature archetypal attributes. As much as Basquiat's figure derives from an actual experience, she presents herself as a stoic woman who has been part of countless cultures over millennia.

The relationship between these two figures is both strange and unclear. Notably, both stare out toward the viewer. While their actions feel natural, the gaze of each suggests a lack of communication between them. Connecting his two figures, Basquiat puts a fork-like object in the sparingly rendered left hand of the female, directly below the chicken. The artist does not tell us whether the female figure is attempting to deal with the male's implied food offering. Because their relationship is undefined, the viewer is led to ask if they are, in fact, actually aware of each other. As much as we want to see the tall male figure as the provider of sustenance, the isolation of the female figure suggests they are disconnected. While it might be tempting to conclude that the lack of figural interaction was the result of Basquiat's inability to convincingly connect his figures, I would suggest that the artist was in complete command of his pictorial intentions. In this regard, the subject of *Arroz con Pollo* is the archetypal portrayal of basic human needs and functions. Both figures allude to the human capacity to provide nourishment, whether in the form of a cooked chicken or the milk from a human

From left to right
The Venus of Willendorf, Upper Paleolithic period
Limestone
Height: 4 3/8 inches, 11 cm

PABLO PICASSO
Femme enceinte (Pregnant Woman), 1948–50
Plaster with metal armature, wood, ceramic vessel, and pottery jars
43 1/4 x 8 5/8 x 12 1/2 inches
110 x 22 x 32 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Arroz con Pollo, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
68 x 84 inches
172.5 x 213.5 cm

breast. Basquiat's figures do not act out an actual event, they act as a metaphor. Both are providers: one fully exposed and in a state of vulnerability, the other more stoic and grounded, in command of his role in life. The emergence of the female image in Basquiat's oeuvre came from the artist's desire to capture a fundamental aspect of human experience: the need for nourishment and the means of providing it. Having just come "in from the street," Basquiat brought with him the recollection of the basic human encounters which he would have witnessed daily.

Self Portrait with Suzanne exemplifies Basquiat's focus on actual people and their stories. This large work on paper portrays the artist and his girlfriend, Suzanne Mallouk, at the height of their close relationship in 1982. Jennifer Clement's book *Widow Basquiat* is the story of that relationship, and of the social milieu in which the relationship unfolds. In the chapter "The Crosby Street Loft Madness," Clement captures aspects of the Basquiat-Mallouk relationship and specifically refers to the artist's execution of *Self Portrait with Suzanne:*

> He paints *Self Portrait with Suzanne*. He paints her speaking her chicken-chatter, 'PTFME E *a a a* R M R MO AAAAAAAA.'
> ...He calls her, 'Venus'. He says, "Hey, Venus come and kiss me."... He writes 'Venus' into his paintings and says Suzanne is only with him for his money.
> Jean-Michel sticks black paper over all the windows so that they won't know if it is day or night. "The day is too light," he says.
> Soon Suzanne stops cleaning and Jean-Michel stays home all day.
> Suzanne finds a place to live under a small table, like a small cat that finds a hiding place. From here she watches Jean-Michel paint, sleep and do drugs. He picks up books, cereal boxes, the newspaper or whatever is around. He finds a word or phrase and paints it on his board or canvas. A few times a day he crawls under the table with Suzanne and gives her a kiss on the forehead. Sometimes he pulls her out, has sex with her, and then puts her back under the table and continues to paint.[2]

If Basquiat's *Self Portrait with Suzanne* is a record of their relationship, it is also a vision of something less tangible, more universal. In the painting, these two figures do not solely exist as corporeal beings, they are also bodies of energy prevailing within and without their physical presence.

Like the four other large-scale works on paper executed at this moment (examined in the overview in this volume on Basquiat and drawing), the two figures of *Self Portrait with Suzanne* were made with the repeated attack of linear strokes in a multitude of colored oil paintsticks. These figures seem to have the density of actual human beings. Many of the same types of strokes are also found in the rendering of the background. Basquiat has surrounded each figure with an array of words, letters, and indecipherable marks, repeated over and over again. These background forms and markings fill up the space, creating a highly activated field of energy, which becomes the underlying subject of the work. The boundary between the figure and ground becomes indistinct. It is this subtler dimension which Basquiat portrays, the figures enveloped, even consumed, by a non-material dimension of experience. While the figures maintain a connection to the physical realm, they are also being pulled toward another.

Jean-Michel Basquiat and Suzanne Mallouk are portrayed in a primordial state, a state of innocence. Removed from the confines of physical reality, they appear untouched. The work was conceived by the artist as testament to one of the most important and meaningful relationships in his life. Unaffected by the comings and goings of temporal or transitory conditions, Basquiat portrays the couple as existing in flux. In touch with, even illuminated by their experience of this subtler realm, they are portrayed as heroic warriors, each with nimbus overhead as if heralding a sacred, universal reality.

One of the more unusual figures in Basquiat's oeuvre, *Mater* (p. 163) shows a female figure reclining on her back with arms and legs raised upward, extending toward the space of the viewer. Her centrally-positioned, fully rounded head is accompanied by a large, radiating nimbus, her legs and arms directed outward towards the edge of the picture. The viewer is drawn in to engage two large, rounded, fully exposed breasts. The figure's navel is sketched briefly, below which appears a downward pointed triangle representing the vaginal area.

The positioning of Basquiat's figure is pictorially as well as thematically dynamic. The diagonally thrusting legs not only energize his figure, but also draw the viewer into the scene. While conveying a great deal of activity, this figure's pose does not suggest an actor conveying a narrative story line. This is a symbolic figure in full command of her raw, unadulterated power. Basquiat's figure authoritatively challenges the viewer to enter into her aura. We even believe that we can sexually engage her.

Mater presents a figure in an act of confrontation. Her physical form fills the entire pictorial space. She does not share the space with any supporting characters. This is a

Opposite
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Self Portrait with Suzanne, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 102 cm

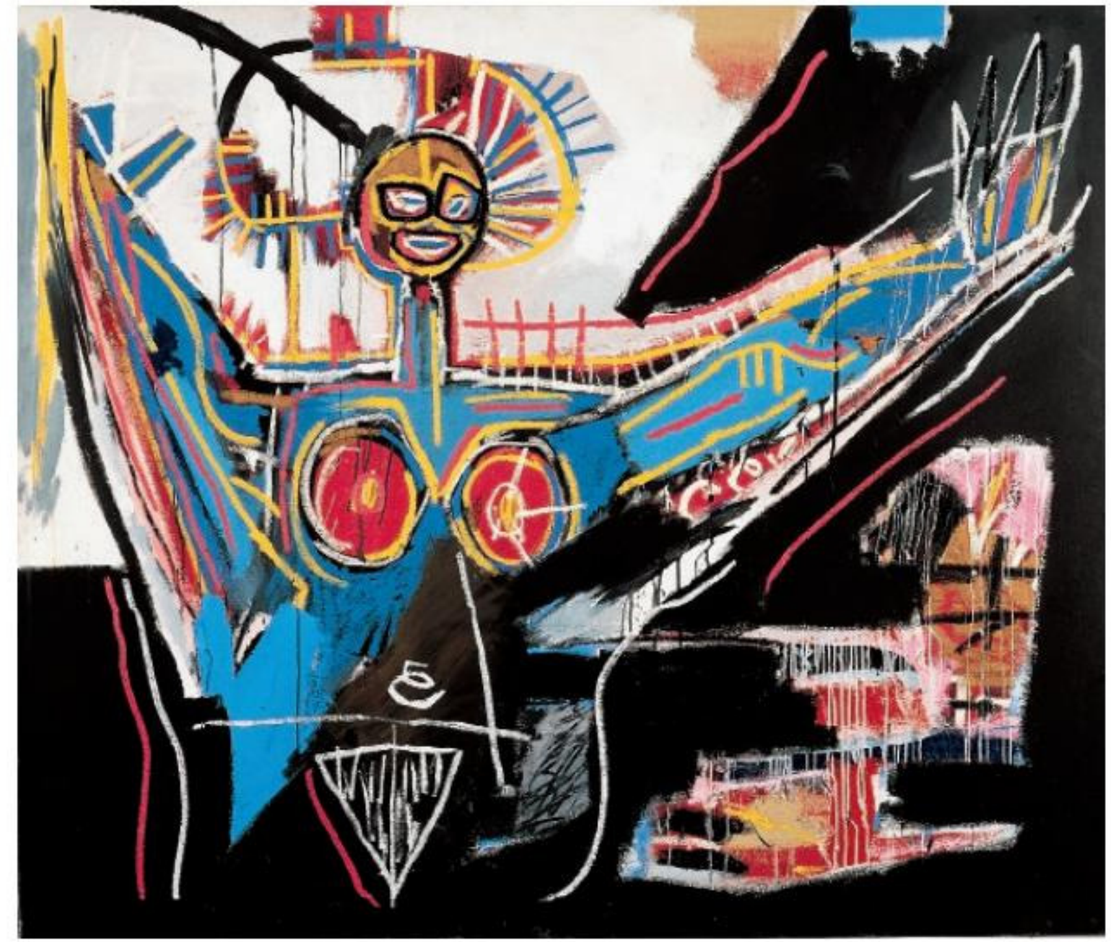
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Robot Man and Woman, 1982
Oil paintstick
and felt pen on paper
22 x 30 inches
56 x 76 cm

figure intended to shock the viewer, her rawness and immediacy striking. Her visceral attributes reveal that her reason for being is the artist's representation of a primordial state. Here, sexuality does not reference a specific experience, but is something more basic, fundamental, and universal. In this regard, *Mater* is the expression of a primeval power lying at the core of the feminine.

Untitled (1983) (p. 165) is a three panel painting, the central and right panels including a multiple number of heads interspersed with words referring to parts of the human body as well as historical references such as LIFE STORY, MARCO POLO, GREEK TRAGEDIES PART TWO and MILES DAVIS. The left panel of the work distinguishes itself from the other two. Here Basquiat has subtly painted with great nuance parts of a standing female figure in rich cream-like skin tones, from a raised and bent arm down to the figure's femur bone between knee and ankle. By indicating just part of the human figure, the artist alludes to the entirety of the body with the words ELBOW, SCAPULA, LIPS, ARM PIT, LOIN, KNEE, TORSO, CRANIUM, AND EYE.

It is unclear how the figure is positioned. The leg and torso appear to be presented from the side while the forearm and hand appear to extend forward toward the viewer, implying a frontal orientation. As Basquiat chose not to depict the figure's head, the positioning of the figure remains elusive.

While he has rendered only a portion of this figure, its positioning suggests a female model in a classical pose. This conclusion is supported by the accompanying text in the upper right of the right panel, where Basquiat wrote LIFE STUDY (ACADEMIC). With a stroke of paint Basquiat has outlined the lower part of a breast, the word TIT next to it; immediately below he wrote and crossed out the



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Mater, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas
72 x 84 inches
183 x 213.5 cm

PABLO PICASSO
Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907
Oil on canvas
96 x 84 inches
244 x 233.7 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas mounted on
wood supports
Triptych: 96 x 72 inches
244 x 183 cm

word PUSSY. While the sexuality of Basquiat's figure is not established by facial features, the inclusion of these words as well as the graceful elegance of the figure's torso and the color of her flesh suggests the representation of the female form.

The sexuality of Basquiat's figure is further established by considering a possible source of his inspiration, and important insight into its iconography. With side and frontal views, and the raised arm, this figure brings to mind Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). Basquiat would have been intimately acquainted with this work from his visits to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. As previously discussed, from the outset of his career Basquiat was fascinated with the simultaneous presentation of multiple views of the human figure and head. *Untitled*, with Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as its backdrop, portrays a single figure from multiple views. Like Picasso, Basquiat turned to this device as his means of establishing a dialogue, an implied relationship, between viewer and subject.

But Basquiat's fascination with Picasso's masterpiece went further. It was not merely the young artist's way to engage the viewer. In this regard, it is constructive to consider the subject of *Les Demoiselles*. By the early 1980s, even the layman had come to recognize Picasso's complex, multi-figural composition as the representation of a brothel scene. While Basquiat's multi-panel painting, containing only a single figure, does not attempt to achieve either the pictorial or thematic complexity of Picasso's work, it must have left an indelible impression on the young Basquiat. Picasso's life experience, which clearly informed his choice of subject matter as well as his revolutionary way of making his subject memorable, was significantly different and removed from that of the twenty-two year old New York painter. Nonetheless, as Basquiat sought to make his own work credible, and discovered his own way to establish a rela-

WILLEM DE KOONING
Woman I, 1950–52
Oil on canvas
75 7/8 x 58 inches
192.7 x 147.3 cm

tionship between viewer and subject matter, Picasso's *Les Demoiselles* revealed an important message. From Picasso, Basquiat gained the confidence to portray the female being observed, both vulnerable and exposed. In this regard Basquiat's work includes two male heads in each of the central and right panels of the work. The piercing gaze of these figures' eyes is directed at the viewer while at the same time intently staring down Basquiat's nude. With Picasso as his guide, *Untitled* announced Basquiat's departure from the age of innocence. Within a few months of the completion of this work, the subject of vulnerability as it relates to the feminine would reach its fullest expression in *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* (1983).

In *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* (1983) a female nude figure advances forward from a backdrop of images, words, and texts. The spatial setting of this work is quite shallow, leaving the viewer with the impression that the figure is in front of a definable body of space. Without any references to a recognizable architectural setting such as a building façade or a cityscape, Basquiat's figure not only asserts her presence, but also dominates the space surrounding her. As such, she is triumphantly positioned in a declarative act, announcing her arrival center stage before the viewer.

In contrast to the very few other full-length female figures in Basquiat's oeuvre, the nude in *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* references a rich iconography, with specific art historical precedents. The work was the artist's way to bring together his thoughts and reflections on a select number of themes with which he had been concerned in 1982–83. In contrast to his earlier, full-length female nude in *Arroz con Pollo*, in which the figure is a part of a narrative, possibly capturing a personal experience, the standing nude of *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* is not an actor portrayed by the artist to tell a story. Basquiat's figure is an icon, a symbol referring to universally recognized human attributes which were of immense interest to the artist as he formulated his world view.

The female nude in *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* is reminiscent of Willem de Kooning's *Woman* series of the early 1950s. We have previously noted Basquiat's interest in the abstract expressionist master's technique of building up pictorial space by the dense, compact layering of gestural paint strokes. De Kooning created a radically new means of achieving a stage-like proscenium without falling back on the used-up fiction of Renaissance illusionism. De Kooning's pictorial structuring and presentation of iconic imagery underlies *Untitled (Crown Hotel)*. Specifically, in de Kooning's *Women* series Basquiat saw how to present an image capturing both the ideal and the mundane. Like de Kooning's *Women*, Basquiat's nude alludes to the idea of beauty and perfection while at the same time to the harsh realities of what the artist has observed and experienced. Unlike de Kooning, in Basquiat's female images he was less attracted to, or enamored with iconic imagery taken from popular culture, whether it be from sources found in fashion, entertainment (such as Marilyn Monroe), or girlie magazines.

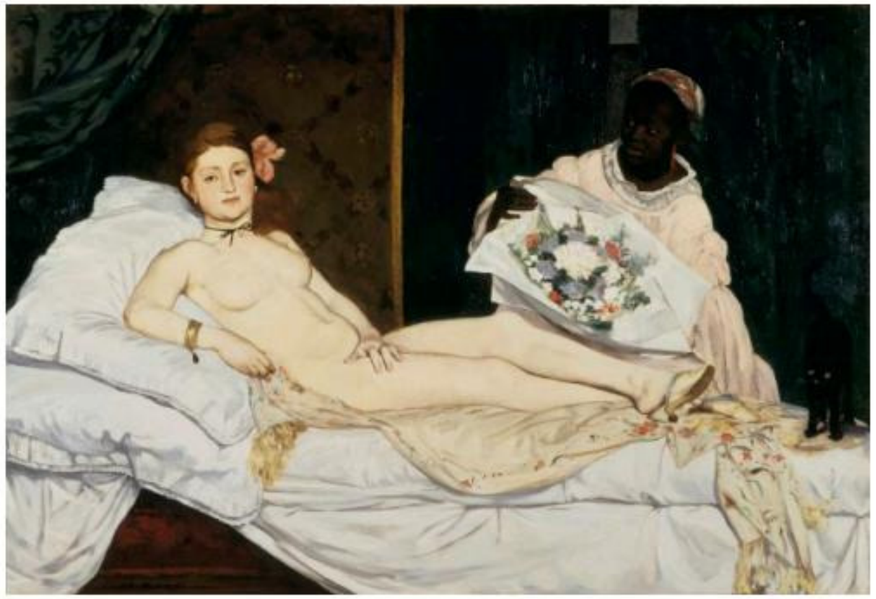
Basquiat's figure is surrounded by a full and rich array of imagery, words and text. With the exception of one, all peripheral images in the top portion of his painting are a human head. The artist has seven heads in the upper left quadrant of the picture, and one upside down, larger head in the upper right. With one exception, each of the eight heads is either drawn or painted on a white ground, which in turn is offset against the work's black background. The resulting effect is the feeling that each head peers from behind a backdrop (or through a window) into the space occupied by the central figure. Whatever we may conclude is the action being undertaken by Basquiat's central figure, she is clearly being observed from behind by an intriguing group of wide-eyed, curious onlookers (or witnesses).

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Crown Hotel), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
48 x 85 inches
122 x 216 cm

Interspersed between background heads and central figure, Basquiat has included a well-planned and cohesively integrated group of words, texts and images, each of which helps to clarify the attributes and iconography of the central figure. Without any prioritization, each word and/or text clarifies the meaning of the work. "Olympia" and "Mona Lisa" are art historical references, the first to Edward Manet's painting *Olympia* of 1863. In fact, this was the third time Basquiat had referred to this earlier work, having made it the specific subject of two paintings executed the previous year: *Three Quarters of Olympia Minus the Servant* (1982) and *Untitled (Maid from Olympia)* (1982) (p. 169). Further alluding to Manet's monumental declaration of the birth of Modern Art, in *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* Basquiat wrote FUCKING CATS, a reference to the black cat positioned at the edge of the couch upon which Manet's nude luxuriously reclines. Showing his fascination with this portion of Manet's picture, Basquiat added the face and paws of a cat in the lower right portion of his painting. Directly over the word OLYMPIA Basquiat painted his signature three pointed, golden crown.

The artist has presented the female nude of *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* as fully exposed. In the work, she steps out of a surrounding body of space filled with words and images. Nothing stands between viewer and this figure. While she is presented as a woman fully in command of her capacity to sexually entice her audience, her relationship to the array of heads behind her reveals her vulnerability. She does not show fear, but she is watched by these background figures, and cannot escape. These peering heads cause us to reconsider Basquiat's nude. Their presence suggests that this figure is a performer on a stage, engaging not only the viewer but also a greater audience. Basquiat's nude is suspended between a theater of voyeurs and a real-life audience.

Basquiat's figure is an iconic depiction of the feminine. While this figure may appear rough and unrefined, she nonetheless exhibits the basic attributes of a classically inspired subject. In this regard, the artist references a rich art historical tradition: key works by Giorgione, Titian, Velasquez, and Goya. Each of these artists uses the reclining female nude to represent an idealized personification of beauty. Linking his figure with Manet's *Olympia* and other masterpieces concerned with the representation of beauty, Basquiat placed a crown directly over the word OLYMPIA sanctifying his image, transforming her into a goddess.



EDOUARD MANET
Olympia, 1863
Oil on canvas
51 1/4 x 74 3/4 inches
130.5 x 191 cm

But if Basquiat sought to contribute to the rich art historical lineage of imagery representing the feminine, this was merely his jumping-off point. Rather than simply portray ideal beauty and perfection, he wanted to link it to the reality of his lived experience. In *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* he achieves this in two ways, in the two references in the painting to Mona Lisa and with the word DEBT. One might say that the *Mona Lisa* is no different than the *Olympia*, for both works may be read as the pictorial expression of ideal beauty. But unlike his reference to Manet's Olympia, Basquiat's reference to Mona Lisa is qualified. First, directly above his nude figure he wrote MONA LISA.17, and to left of the head he wrote SEVENTEEN PERCENT MONA LISA FOR FOOLS. Both texts show his desire to disassociate his figure from representing human perfection. As Basquiat puts it, such a linkage is "for fools." For Basquiat, the portrayal of the female form in *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* was yet another way to create a duality between the ideal and the real. This juxtaposition was enhanced by the inclusion of the word DEBT, which suggests the real life struggle for survival.

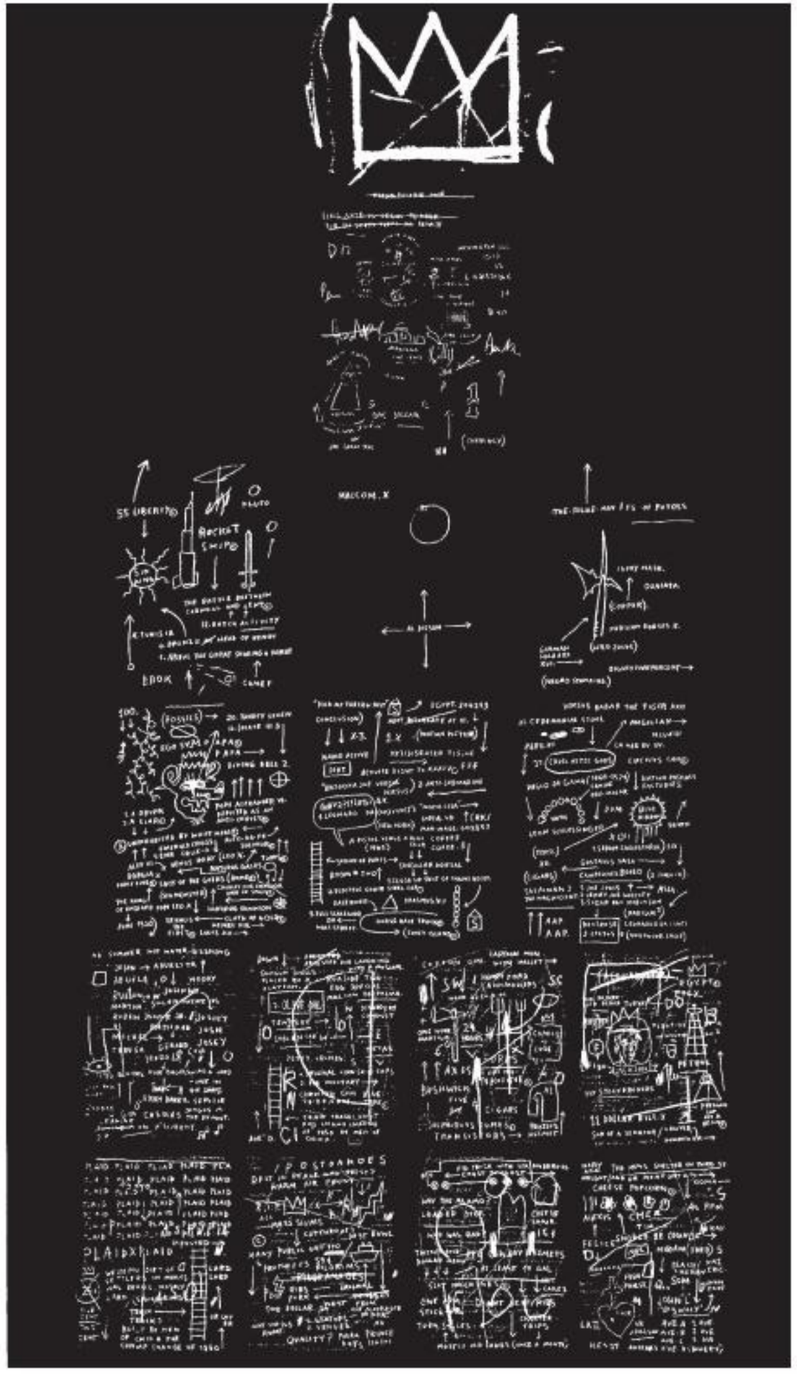
It is tempting to interpret *Untitled (Crown Hotel)* as Basquiat's portrayal of a brothel. In this regard, the work again recalls Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. I would propose that this figure is neither a whore nor the personification of a goddess. Rather, she is suspended between worlds. She is neither an object for sale to voyeurs with their "six American dollars" nor an empowered goddess, who under the command of the god Atlas is an agent for change. Basquiat's figure and his *Crown Hotel* are in a state of flux, influenced and directed by our quest for the satisfaction of our earthly needs and our intuitive drive to transcend the impermanent—"obviously a fire"—and achieve some kind of deeper understanding of the forces guiding us. ■

Notes

1. "Mona Lisa" by Ray Evans and Jay Livingston for Paramount Pictures film *Captain Carey*. USA, 1950; soundtrack version sung by Nat King Cole.

2. Jennifer Clement, *Widow Basquiat, A Love Story*. Payback Press (an imprint of Canongate Books), 2000, Edinburgh, pages 72-74.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Maid from Olympia), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
48 1/4 x 30 inches
122.5 x 76 cm



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Tuxedo, 1983
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
102 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches
261 x 151.8 cm

CHAPTER 7

JEAN-MICHEL IN BLACK AND WHITE

What up? No, what up?
My name is Jamie Foxx.
Give it up, give it up... New York City;
Saturday Night Live, Make some noise.
And I'm dressed in all black.
It's good to be black.
Black is the new white.
I'm telling you.
How black is this right here?
How do I know that black is in right now?
Cuz the Nets moved to Brooklyn!
How black is that?
They have black jerseys, and a black court.
I mean, how black is that?
And Jay Z is the owner. A rapper!
How black is that?
and Jay Z only owns about this much of the team.
But he acts like he owns all of New York!
How black is that?
Speaking of blackness, my President,
President Obama is back up in the White House
four more years.
How black is that?
And not only that, he's so black,
he was playing basketball on election day!
How black is that?
But he was also late for his acceptance speech.
Ok, all the white folks out in the audience,
How black is that?

Jamie Foxx[1]

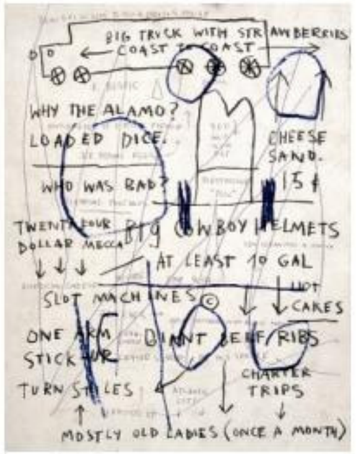
SHORTLY AFTER HE SETTLED INTO HIS NEW STUDIO IN THE gallery of Larry Gagosian's Venice residence, Jean-Michel Basquiat and I started the production of the first of his large-scale silkscreen works. Composed from fifteen individual drawings and one collage on paper, this work, which upon completion would be titled *Tuxedo*, required a fair amount of technical know-how and some interesting choices by the artist. Basquiat wanted to reverse his original artwork from black images and text on a white background to white images and text on a black background. This was all achieved photographically, turning the artist's original artwork into one large silkscreen. During production, not much thought was given to the artist's intent in reversing the content of the original artworks. From the moment that *Tuxedo* was completed, however, it became clear that Basquiat's decision to turn everything black into white and everything white into black was not merely a look he desired to achieve. Basquiat's esthetic decisions were his means of addressing certain social and cultural assumptions, most importantly a questioning of identity.[2]

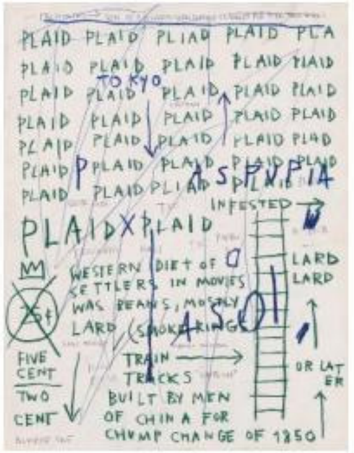
Tuxedo was completed at virtually the same time in early 1983 that Jean-Michel Basquiat produced and directed the early rap record *Beat Bop*. Released on the artist's own Tartown Record Company label, the long-playing album was made in collaboration with Fred Braithwaite, Toxic, A-One, Al Diaz, and Rammellezee. The cover art, sharing with *Tuxedo* the same reversal of black and white imagery, is further testament to Basquiat's fascination with the esthetic look he explored in *Tuxedo*.

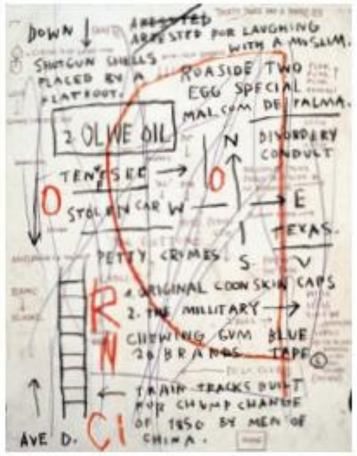
We timed the production of *Tuxedo* so the completed artwork could be included in Basquiat's forthcoming exhibition at the Larry Gagosian Gallery in West Hollywood. It became a striking counterpart to the rich, colorful paintings laden with multi-layered images that formed the majority of the exhibition. The reaction to *Tuxedo* was complicated. One of the artist's biggest collectors at the time immediately committed to acquire the example on exhibit, only to change his mind upon learning that the work was not unique, but one of an edition of ten. Several months later, when Tony Shafrazi asked Basquiat for a work for his upcoming exhibition "Champions," the artist was excited to send another example of *Tuxedo* to the New York Gallery, only to be informed by the gallery that they had expected a painting for their "important" exhibition. Taking *Tuxedo* back to his studio on Crosby Street, Basquiat, somewhat despondent, responded by actually painting on this version of *Tuxedo*.

Basquiat's desire to include *Tuxedo* in the Shafrazi Gallery exhibition is meaningful for a number of reasons.

TAMRA DAVIS
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Fred Hoffman, Venice, CA, 1983; *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, 2010 (screen grab)







P. 173, from left to right, top to bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Mostly Old Ladies), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 5/8 x 15 1/4 inches
49.8 x 38.7 cm

Untitled (Jackson), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches
49 x 38.7 cm

Untitled (Plaid), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 5/8 x 15 1/2 inches
49.8 x 39.4 cm

Untitled (Olive Oil), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 3/8 inches
49 x 39 cm

Untitled (Quality), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 1/2 inches
49 x 39.4 cm

Untitled (Cheese Popcorn), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches
49 x 38.7 cm

"Champions" was the first important survey of the emerging generation of artists whose work reflected the new social and cultural currents in downtown New York. Prior to their introduction in this and subsequent gallery exhibitions (at the Tony Shafrazi and Fun Galleries), many of these artists' art productions took place on the streets. They soon became identified as "graffiti artists," because they tagged primarily outdoor locations with imagery and texts. The "Champions" exhibition quickly became seen as the arrival and validation of this new generation of artists, and their transformation from artists of the street to acceptance in the more hallowed ground of an established and highly respected art gallery. Basquiat wanted to introduce a completely new look by presenting *Tuxedo* in this context; not only was the work distinctive, it was "cool." It was for this reason that he named the work *Tuxedo*. This work conveys the qualities of elegance, refinement, and a sense of mystery, just as the wearer of a tuxedo might.

In presenting an artwork which would immediately be perceived as a manifestation of cool in this groundbreaking group show, Jean-Michel Basquiat saw *Tuxedo* as a way to assert his own, unique voice in downtown hip hop culture. Even though he had a brief history as a graffiti tagger, he had moved on to the establishment of the New York art world. *Tuxedo* represented Basquiat's new way of tagging, of making his esthetic activity a declarative act. Just as every tagger has their "own arrow," the key artistic decisions resulting in *Tuxedo*, and especially the decision to reverse the content from white into black and black into white, resulted in Basquiat finding a completely original and unique means of expression.[3] *Tuxedo* became the artist's declaration that he still embraced the spirit of street culture.

Jay Z's comment on hip hop is insightful:

> ...it (the street) is the place where I learned not just who I was, but who we were, who all of us are. It was the site of my moral education, as strange as that may sound... I was part of a generation of kids who saw something special about what it means to be human—something bloody and dramatic and scandalous that happened right here in America—and hip hop was our way of reporting that story, telling it to ourselves and to the world.[4]

Tuxedo was Basquiat's expression of hip hop culture. As Jay Z put it, "Hip hop was looking for a narrative." The stacking of condensed, compressed and reversed texts and images in *Tuxedo* was Basquiat's hip hop narrative. The artist's texts and images present bits and pieces of the world he observed, the world he grew up in on the streets

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Crown), 1983
Acrylic, ink, and paper collage on paper
20 x 29 inches
51 x 74 cm

of New York City and in front of a television set. They function in much the same manner as the words of a rapper. Again, as Jay Z notes,

> "...close observation is at the heart of rap. Great rappers from the earliest days distinguish themselves by looking closely at the world around them and describing it in a clever, artful way."[5]

This is precisely the intent and the achievement of *Tuxedo*. Much like hip hop and early rap, the text and images of *Tuxedo*, grounded in a reality resulting from first-hand experience, do not project a moralistic message. Presenting "patterns and details and connections,"[6] Basquiat turns the familiar into the strange and oftentimes mysterious. The text-images in *Tuxedo* never become gratuitous. As Jay Z insightfully notes:

> "poets and hustlers play with language because for them simple clarity can mean failure. They bend language, improvise and invent new ways of speaking the truth."[7]

Hip hop tells the story of the young black man's struggle to survive and resist, the struggle to win and make sense of it all. Two voices came forth, one from the hustler, the other from the creator. Paraphrasing Jay Z, these two stories overlapped as much as they diverged. Identity was never clearly defined, it was malleable and flexible. For the legions of young black men caught up in this culture, the struggle was not just on the street. The more fundamental battle was in the mind of the young black man as he sought to find his place in the world. Hip hop is essentially the telling of this story, the quest for identity in urban black culture.

Tuxedo shares with hip hop the blurring of identity. Much like the voice of the early rapper and black poet of the early 1980s, *Tuxedo* pulls the viewer back and forth between the world of a black man in a white world and that of a white man in a black world. This is the relevance of Jamie Foxx's opening monologue on *Saturday Night Live*, thirty years after Basquiat first presented *Tuxedo*. Both Foxx's words and Basquiat's imagery play with the switching of identity. While Foxx's words and demeanor hardly feel threatening, the confrontational voice of Malcom X is present as a precursor. While the overall look of *Tuxedo* may be visually seductive, this innovative work of art also serves as a reminder of Malcolm X's challenge to the white man and his sense of superiority to the black man in society.

The esthetic look of many of the individual text/image sections of *Tuxedo* is also an acknowledgment of hip hop and rap culture. This is especially evident in examining original drawings that were the basis for the silkscreen. All untitled, key examples are two drawings in the collection of the Whitney Museum of Art and four in the private collection of the Brant Foundation. The original drawings, executed in oil paintstick, and ballpoint pen, present a layering of individual words and short lines of text with the occasional insertion of an image. In their density and compactness, these drawings, along with a few of the drawings which were used in the silkscreen on canvas *Untitled*, are unique in the artist's oeuvre. Basquiat's working method in each of these works is unclear. It is unknown whether he began at the top or bottom of the sheet of paper, and whether he worked first in oil paintstick or ballpoint pen. He probably went back and forth, a word or phrase inspiring a new association, resulting in an intertwined web of text and imagery. In many cases a word or phrase is repeated, sometimes multiple times.

The words, phrases and images used in these drawings reflect an observation or thought. In the layering of content the artist turns the recognizable and obvious into something new and unexpected by mixing and combining words, images, and graphic references. Hip hop and rap artists employ a similar strategy. There is a similar density and intensity in the structuring and diversity of rap lyrics, driven by an underlying beat, that echo the raw edges of street life.

Basquiat shared a certain spirit with hip hop culture, and some of the same historical-cultural influences, but he stood apart. While the hip hop artist provided commentary, Basquiat was the purveyor of insight, pointing the way toward something more universal, even transcendental.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Beat Bop, 1983
Album cover and back cover, Tartown Records
12 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches
32 x 32 cm

In this regard, *Tuxedo* is much more than a unique expression of an artist's observations. In *Tuxedo*, Basquiat transforms personal observations into a pictorial format with a path and direction.

As we have noted, *Tuxedo* comprises fifteen distinct sections of texts and images, with an image of a crown at the top. The texts and images are highly structured and ordered in their presentation. The bottom two rows each contain four distinct, block-like word/text configurations, followed by three sections in the third and fourth rows, followed by one directly below the crown. Within several individual panels Basquiat has drawn both ladders and arrows. These images combined with the basic structural ordering in the work invite the eye to move from the bottom of the work to the top, and imply ascent toward a spiritual place as symbolized by the image of a crown. While the pathway depicted by the artist is, predictably, not diagrammatic, and is far from a reliable road map, it nonetheless directs us in an upward direction. While Basquiat's arrows "point" the way, ladders in at least one section of text and images in each of the bottom three levels invite climbing up. As we move up, the information becomes increasingly sparse. We have moved from a vast array of facts, symbols and references toward a realm less well defined.

The large crown at the top announces an "arrival." Freed from references to the constant bombardment of information and stimulus experienced on the street, Basquiat's crown declares a state of liberation. If the lower part of *Tuxedo*, paying tribute to the spirit of hip hop, captures Basquiat's "visionary social observation of astounding exactitude,"[8] the positioning of the a luminous white crown at the "summit" of the work indicates a leaving behind of one's daily experience. ■

Notes

1. Monologue on *Saturday Night Live*, December 8, 2012

2. It is interesting to note that Basquiat's large silkscreen on canvas, *Untitled* (1983), produced immediately after *Tuxedo* and sharing with it the reversal of imagery from white into black and black into white, was the first work by the artist to enter the collection of an American art museum. *Untitled* was given to the Museum of Modern Art in 1984. After it was in the catalogue for the MOMA 1984 exhibition "An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture," the work was completely overlooked by the museum, and excluded when the museum first put its collection online. It was not exhibited in the galleries until 2015. Only with the collaboration between MOMA and Uniqlo beginning in 2014, when a cropped image of *Untitled* was used as the signature image for the marketing of the "SPRZ" collection of iconic artist images applied to clothes, did the museum finally recognize the work as part of its collection.

3. The concept of every graffiti artist having his unique look or expression, and referring to it as his "own arrow," is found throughout the literature on graffiti culture. One example is "The History and Evolution of Arrows in Graffiti Art," by Ilyse Spiegel. Ezinearticles.com, February 10, 2011.

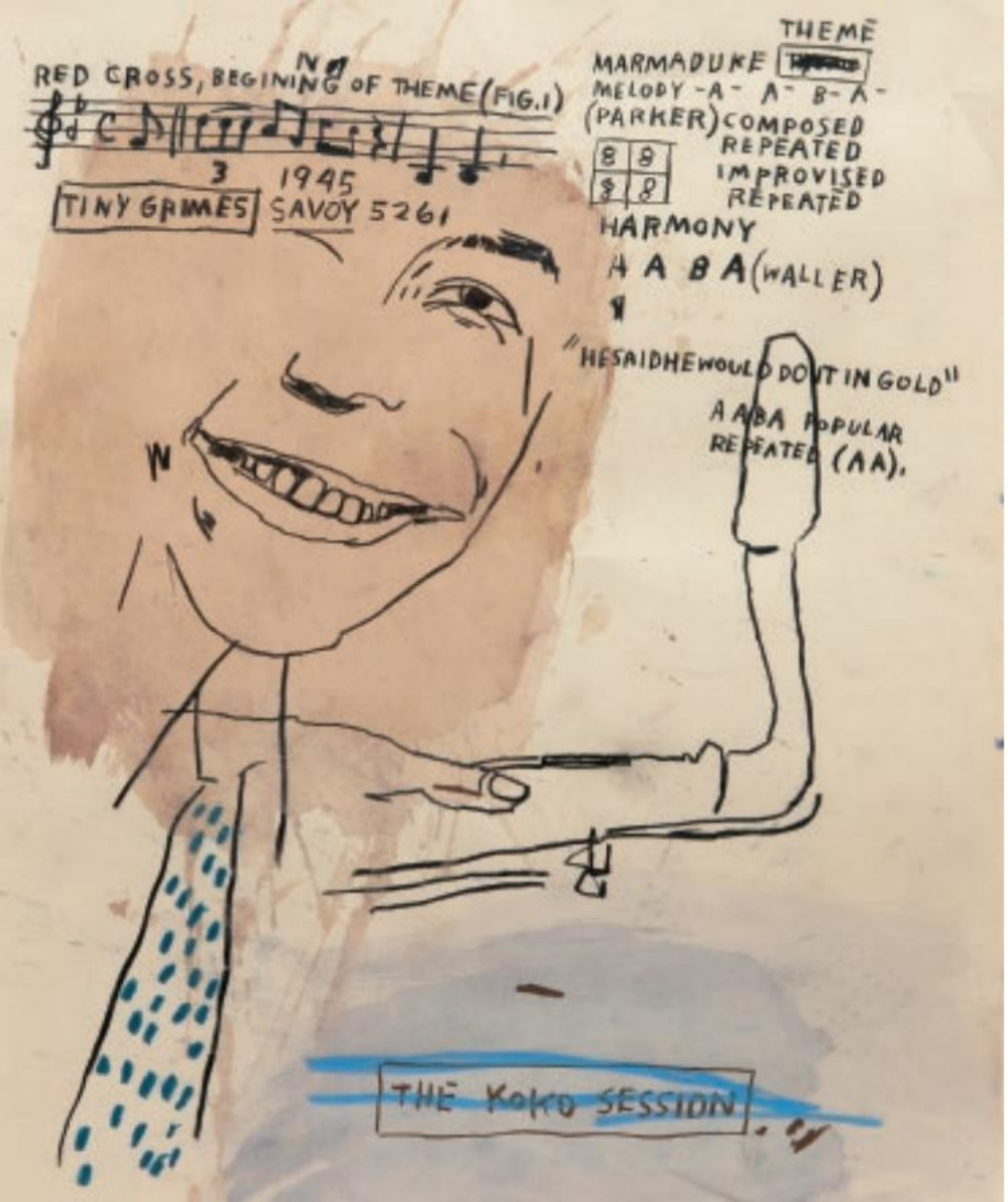
4. Jay Z, *Decoded*. New York. Spiegel and Grau, 2010, page 18.

5. Ibid., 203.

6. Ibid., 201.

7. Ibid., 56.

8. Joseph Frank (commenting on Balzac) in *Dostoevsky, A Writer in His Time*. Princeton. Princeton University Press, 2010, page 58.



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Charlie Parker)
(detail), 1983
Oil paintstick and ink on paper
30 x 22 1/4 inches
76 x 56.5 cm

CHAPTER 8

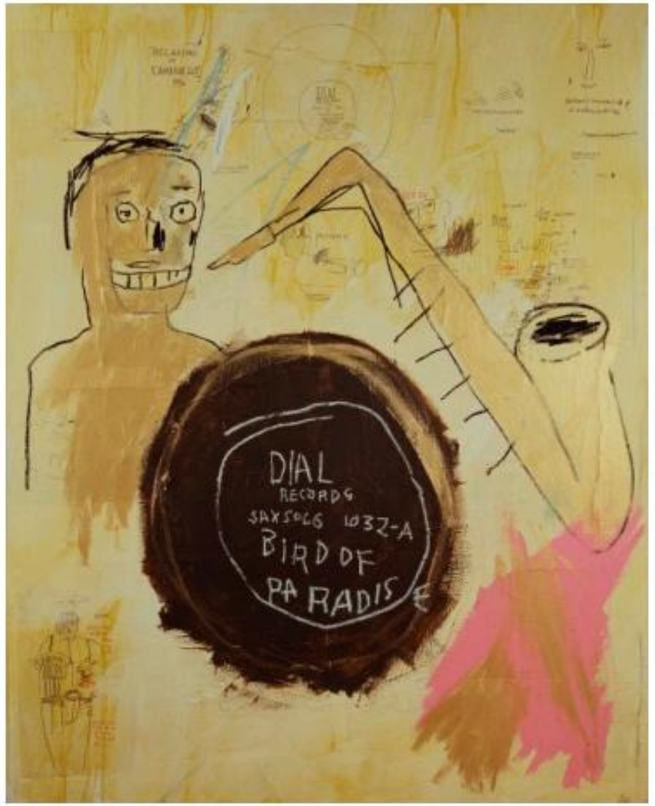
BASQUIAT ON JAZZ

Dedicated to the memory of Gerard Basquiat

I

SOMETIME EARLY IN 1984 I MENTIONED TO JEAN-MICHEL Basquiat that through an intermediary, I was able to facilitate his introduction to the comedian Richard Pryor. My contact worked for Pryor's production company. She had told him about a highly unique and important young black artist. While this was the period immediately following Pryor's life-changing accident in which he had burned portions of his body and face, Pryor was nonetheless interested in meeting the young Basquiat. When we conveyed this to Jean-Michel, he proposed that he would like to not only meet Richard Pryor, but also to paint his portrait. I subsequently arranged for Jean-Michel to visit the comedian.

I accompanied Basquiat to Richard Pryor's office. I did not go into the meeting, but waited in the reception while Jean-Michel visited with Pryor for around forty-five minutes. I can only imagine how Pryor reacted to the presence of such a handsome, quick, and confident young black man with long, flowing dreadlocks, dressed in Armani, different from many of the young black men Pryor had come to know. Yet Basquiat was nothing if not respectful; I'm quite confident that he did not come off as a threat to the fragile and damaged comedian. Basquiat knew that he was entering Pryor's life at a precarious moment as the comedian tried to put his life back together. When Jean-Michel emerged from the office, I could instantly tell that he was disturbed by the encounter. Clearly, in his vulnerability, the ever more paranoid Pryor felt threatened by the young painter's offer to paint his portrait. This is not to imply that Basquiat did not have his own insecurities. At this moment Basquiat clearly felt vulnerable, and it is quite possible that the encounter with Richard Pryor left the painter questioning his own confidence and self-esteem. In either case, when I returned Basquiat to his studio he immediately set to work on a series of drawings, each a depiction of Charlie Parker. Before he asked me to deliver these drawings to Richard Pryor as an appreciation of the comedian's willingness to meet a stranger, Basquiat made multiple photocopies of each original drawing. By the next evening these copies had found their way into a small series of paintings, each dedicated to the life of Charlie Parker. While most of the paintings Basquiat was producing at that time were built up with layer upon layer of imagery and brushwork, these pictures were much more reductive and minimal. Several of these works contained a single collaged image of Charlie Parker set against a broad expanse of muted yellow or a luminous baby-blue field of color. Not only did the placement and spareness of imagery feel different in these



From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and photocopy collage on canvas
60 x 48 inches
152.5 x 122 cm

CHARLIE PARKER
Koko Sessions, 1945
Album cover
New Sounds in Modern Music
12 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches
32 x 32 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Plastic Sax, 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and photocopy collage on canvas
60 x 48 inches
152.5 x 122 cm

works, but the colors the artist used conveyed a somberness and distance I had not seen before in Basquiat's work.

Because it was immediately apparent that these paintings differed so significantly from all of the other paintings Basquiat was producing in Los Angeles, I was drawn to conclude that these pictures were much more personal, and had to be seen in light of the painter's experience with the comedian/actor. Basquiat interpreted Richard Pryor's inability to allow the young painter into his life as a sign that his own life was misunderstood and not fully appreciated. For Basquiat, this conclusion caused him to reflect on the life of Charlie Parker, the creative genius who was to play such a vital part in the young painter's life.

That evening, Basquiat produced about eight paintings depicting Charlie Parker. Not all of this series is documented in the literature. I recall him painting one very large, 72 x 96 inches canvas, the entire surface bathed in a subtle baby blue, a color that he had never previously used. Immersed in this field of color was the outline of a male figure, the musician, holding a martini up to his mouth while propped up against to a barely defined bar. Other works in this series include an unpublished work which for many years hung behind the maître d' station at the Ivy at the Shore restaurant in Santa Monica, and five other sketchily rendered pictures, each containing faint collaged images of the musician (an actual portrait of Charlie Parker and plastic sax).

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Max Roach, 1984
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas
60 x 60 inches
152.5 x 152.5 cm

Today, two works from this series, *Plastic Sax* (1984) and *Untitled (Bird of Paradise)* (1984) are distinguished for their depictions of Charlie Parker and musical references to his career. *Plastic Sax*, which was quickly acquired by the designer Agnes B and hung in her store near the Larry Gagosian Gallery in West Hollywood, is of particular interest, as the title of the work refers to a specific and important moment in the life of Charlie Parker. The work contains multiple images of the musician, one sipping a cocktail, two standing portraits, as well as one image of Parker performing on his saxophone. While in Toronto, Charlie Parker and his quintet were scheduled to perform at Massey Hall. As the saxophonist had pawned his instrument, and as he was under contract to only use a specific brand of saxophone in the United States, Parker was free to use for this Canadian performance a Grafton injection molded, cream colored acrylic plastic alto saxophone with metal keys. As the recording *Jazz at Massey Hall* attests, Charlie Parker, performing with Bud Powell, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus and Max Roach, made beautiful, inventive and memorable music that evening. Basquiat's painting is a reflection on the adversity that seemed to be so much part of Charlie Parker's creative life.

II

In Ross Russell's classic biography *Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker*, he characterizes the musical contribution of the legendary horn player:

> Charlie Parker was the last of a breed of jazzmen apprenticed at an early age, styled in emulation of great master players, tempered in the rough-and-tumble school of the jam session, a master of his craft by the end of his teens, disciplined to the exacting requirements of the big swing bands, and, eventually, the maverick who turned his back on the big bands to create, almost single handedly, the musical revolution of the Forties.[1]

If you changed the name and references from jazz in the 1940s to contemporary painting in the 1980s, you could apply a similar characterization to Jean-Michel Basquiat. The comparisons between Basquiat and Parker go even further than the aesthetic and socio-cultural breakthroughs achieved by Charlie Parker, emulated by the young painter some forty years later. Not only did Basquiat find inspiration in the music of "Bird," but he also saw several parallels in their lives.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Trumpet, 1984
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas
60 x 60 inches
152.5 x 152.5 cm

Both Parker and Basquiat were teenage prodigies. Parker began serious study of the saxophone by the age of thirteen and was a member of a performing band when he was fifteen. When he was seventeen, Basquiat began to sell hand-painted postcards and t-shirts to make a little money, and several months before his twentieth birthday, Basquiat's art was publicly exhibited for the first time in the now legendary *Times Square Show*. Neither Parker nor Basquiat completed high school. Parker dropped out in the tenth grade, while Basquiat, according to his own biography, took "some academic life drawing in the ninth grade (was the only child that failed)"[2] and dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade. Both artists died tragically, in the prime of their careers.

Just as Parker was misunderstood, unfairly criticized, and not properly recognized, so too did Basquiat view his own life and career. But more importantly, Basquiat was drawn to Charlie Parker because of the musical genius's ability to make his music an expression of the primacy of his soul. Stanley Crouch astutely captures this aspect of Parker's creative drive:

> The small, curved brass instrument with cane reed and pearl buttons was throttled and twisted, until it allowed him to express a barely stifled cry that was ever near the edge of consuming rage, the pain of consciousness elevated to extraordinary musical articulation.[3]

As recognition of the importance Basquiat assigned to the life and music of Parker, from 1982 to 1984, the young painter made no fewer than sixteen paintings on the subject of the musician. Some of these works can be considered Basquiat's greatest works. That Basquiat was consumed by the life and story of Parker is further shown by the fact that the young painter not only had read *Bird Lives*, but also had multiple cartons of the book in his studio, which he regularly gave away to visitors. He was not merely making his guest aware of "CPRKR," but also hoping that his own life and work would be considered in a larger historical and cultural context.

Probably Basquiat's most straightforward and sensitive

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
CPRKR, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
60 x 40 inches
152.5 x 101.5 cm

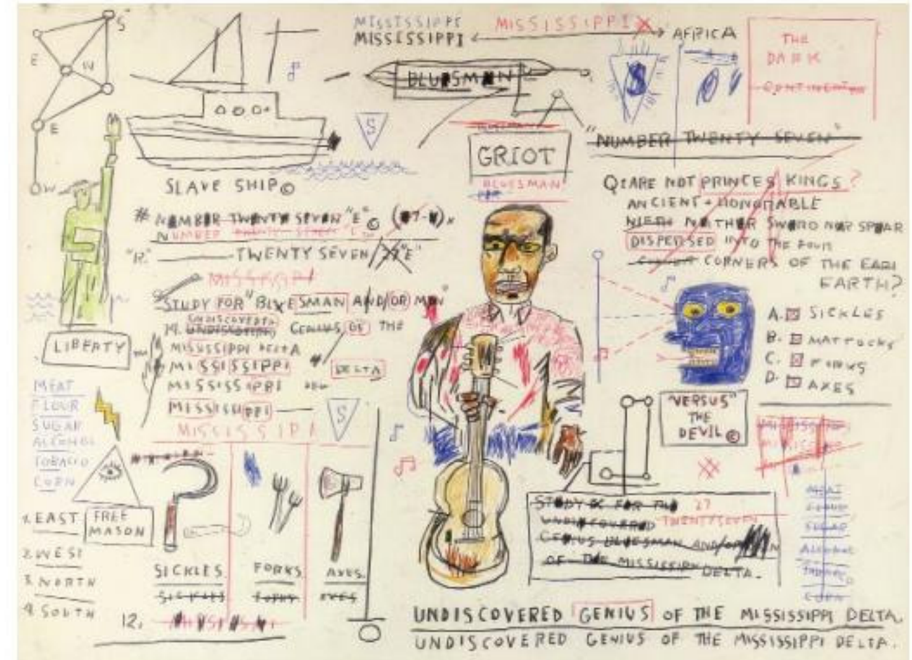
portrayal of Charlie Parker is *Untitled (Portrait of Charlie Parker)* (1983), a work on paper. Of all the works by the artist referencing the musician, this is the only one that fully captures a lifelike depiction of the artist. While the portrait of Parker is simply rendered with a few black strokes in oil paintstick placed on top of a washed light brown ground, the musician's likeness is verified by comparing it to a photograph of Charlie Parker that was the cover art for Charlie Parker's long playing album on the Savoy label in the New Sounds of Modern Music series.[4] The photograph was likely the source Basquiat used in his rendering of the musician.

Basquiat's drawing pays homage to, and in part documents the "Koko Sessions," the now historic recording on November 26, 1945 when Charlie Parker was booked to record a standard three hour, four side session for tiny Savoy Records at WOR studios in New York City. This was Parker's first session as a bandleader. The band he had booked for this date was Charlie Parker's Reboppers: Miles Davis on trumpet, Dizzy Gillespie on trumpet and piano, Bud Powell on piano, Curly Russell on bass, and Max Roach on drums. Basquiat's drawing also includes a "shout out" to the legendary guitar man Lloyd "Tiny" Grimes, who made four recordings with his own group, accompanied by Charlie Parker, that are considered prime examples of early bebop jazz. Except for this one, all the text references included in the drawing refer to stylistic concepts and accomplishments or actual compositions recorded in the historic Savoy sessions. Summing up the breakthroughs Parker made this historic day, Devon "Doc" Wendell notes:

> While playing over the changes of Ray Noble's "Cherokee," Parker realized that by abandoning the traditional melody line and improvising over the chord changes with altered harmonies he could do anything. "I realized by using the high notes of the chords as a melody line, and by the right harmonic progression, I could play what I heard inside of me. That's when I was born."[5]

Jean-Michel Basquiat's drawing is a warm, genuine tribute to this musical giant. While this drawing is a simple, even modest rendering of Charlie Parker, many of the paintings Basquiat undertook that have the musician as their subject are neither simple nor modest. Works such as *CPRKR, Charles the First, Now's the Time* or *Horn Players* evidence the inspiration that Parker's musical contribution gave to the young Basquiat. In these works Basquiat achieves a "revolution" in painting similar to what Charlie Parker achieved in jazz music.

Beginning in 1982 and continuing regularly throughout his career, Basquiat made music one of the central subjects of his pictorial output. To date, I have documented thirty-five paintings on canvas as well as eleven works on paper executed by the artist that refer to the history of jazz and its individual figures. As noted, about half of these works were devoted to the life and music of Charlie Parker. A list of these paintings includes many of the artist's most well recognized and accomplished works: *CPRKR* (1982); *Charles the First* (1982); *Charlie Parker* (1982); *Discography (One)* (1983); *Discography (Two)* (1983); *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* (1983); *Horn Players* (1983); *Untitled* (1983); *Revised Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* (1983); *Trumpet* (1984); *Max Roach* (1984); *Charlie Parker* (1984); *Untitled* (1984); *Zydeco* (1984); *Plastic Sax* (1984); *Bird as Buddha* (1984); *Now's The Time* (1985); *Bird of Paradise* (1984); *Worthy Constituents* (1986); *Untitled (Jazz)* (1986); *King Zulu*



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Undiscovered Genius, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, charcoal, graphite and colored pencil
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm

Page 184
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Charles the First, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 78 x 62 inches
198 x 158 cm

Page 185
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Horn Players, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 96 x 75 inches
244 x 190.5 cm

(1986); *In the Wings* (1986); *Untitled (Savoy)* (1986); *Embittered* (1986); *and Bird* (1988).[6] In addition, the author recalls several additional Charlie Parker paintings created in 1984 in response to the artist's encounter with Richard Pryor. Basquiat also produced eleven works on paper in which jazz figures and history were his subject. These include *Untitled* (1982); *Untitled* (c. 1983); *Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta* (1983), from the Daros Collection suite of thirty-two works on paper; *Untitled (Portrait of Charlie Parker)* (1983); *Untitled, (Estrella)* (1985),*Untitled (Now's The Time)* (1985); *Untitled* (1985); *Untitled* (1985); *Untitled* (1985) and *Untitled* (1985).

Basquiat's interest in music was not solely confined to using the icons of modern jazz and their history as the subject for his pictorial output. Basquiat's interest extended to both performing and producing. It is well documented that early in his artistic career, before his recognition in the New York art world, Basquiat created and performed in a band called Grey. This band was the natural outgrowth of his participation in the downtown club scene. Basquiat was even more recognized for single-handedly producing the underground classic hip-hop and proto-rap album *Beat Bop* in 1983. Basquiat made original art for the front and back covers of the album, and it became something of an instant classic in the downtown club scene.[7]

Painted in 1982 when he was twenty-one, *Charles the First* is the summation of the young Basquiat's reflection on Charlie Parker. This work was of special importance to him; he chose it for his first museum exhibition in 1984 at

HALOES
FIFTY NINE CENT.
THOR
X-MN
MOST
KINGS GET
THIER HEAD
1953
FEET
HANDS
CUT OFF.
PIECE
HOMEPLACE
1. OPERA
CHEROKEE

CHAN.
EAR
ORNITHOLOGY
PREE.
SOAP
FEET.
DIZZY GIL
ORNITHOLOGY.
ORNITHOLOGY.
ORNITHOLOGY.
TEETH
ALCHEMY.
ALCHEMY.
ALCHEMY.
ALCHEMY.

the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, and it has been included in every major retrospective of the artist's work. The work remained in the artist's personal collection throughout his life. The title, *Charles the First*, refers to the English monarch who ruled England, Scotland and Ireland from 1625 to 1649. Believing in the divine right of kings, Charles I ruled according to his own conscience. Basquiat would have been drawn to the independence as well as the eventual trial and execution of this English ruler as he sought out the appropriate metaphors for his portrayal of Charlie Parker. In referring to this monarch, Basquiat sees the musician as a martyr for the way he lived and died for his practice.

Charles the First is a tribute to Parker's musical accomplishments as well as a statement about the potential pitfalls accompanying creative breakthroughs. Nowhere is this dichotomy more fully expressed than in the left panel of the three-part work. The uppermost portion of the left canvas of the painting includes the word HALOES, below which is an oil paintstick rendering of the artist's iconic crown and the word THOR; and in the bottom portion of the panel, extending across into the center section is the text MOST YOUNG KINGS GET THIER (sic) HEAD CUT OFF.

In the left panel, the "S" symbol for Superman appears twice. This reference to the comic book hero, supported by the reference to the Norse God THOR, was Basquiat's assertion of power and strength. Alluding to his own creativity in the repeated depiction of a hand, Basquiat heralds Parker's creativity with the word CHEROKEE, referring to Charlie Parker's recording and the birth of bebop. With the crown and the word HALOES, the artist sanctifies Parker's creative acts. Supporting this, two years after painting *Charles the First* he used the image of the musician in a painting appropriately titled *Bird as Buddha*. As characterized in Basquiat's symbols and references, Charlie Parker occupied a sacred space. But the young artist also brought his hero back down to earth. In the end, as the work proclaims, even the creative genius does not survive. As the work states, "most young kings get thier (sic) head cut off."

III

Horn Players (1983) is one of the most comprehensive narrative-history paintings on the subject of jazz in the oeuvre of Jean-Michel Basquiat. This three-panel painting portrays two of the legends of bebop, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. In the left panel is Parker, performing on his alto saxophone, as the musical notes suggest. Above the figure Basquiat has written CHAN, while below

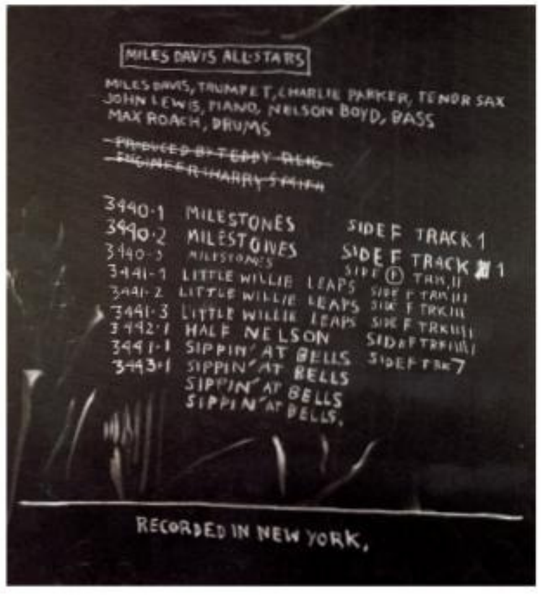
From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Charlie Parker's All Stars), 1983
Crayon on paper
24 x 11 1/8 inches
61 x 28 cm

King Zulu, 1986
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
79 1/2 x 100 inches
202 x 254 cm

appears the word PREE. Both words were nicknames for the legendary musician. The representation of a specific figure is less clear in the central panel. While the bifurcated head does not seem to refer to a specific person, the trumpet outline nearby suggests that this figure is Dizzy Gillespie. Above the head Basquiat has written the names of both musicians, DIZZY GILLESPIE and CHARLIE PARKER. The right panel unmistakably portrays the horn player. The figure is holding a trumpet, and the shape of his head, mustache, and glasses clearly capture the likeness of Dizzy Gillespie.

Each of the three panels contains the word ORNITHOLOGY. The right panel repeats the word three times. This makes the work a history painting, referring to a bebop standard written by alto saxophonist Charlie Parker and Benny Harris, and first recorded by the Charlie Parker Septet on March 28, 1946 on the Dial Label. The tune's title, "Ornithology" is a reference to Parker's nickname "Bird."

"Ornithology" is a *contrafact*—a musical composition of a new melody overlaid on a familiar, harmonic structure. As a compositional device it was of particular importance in the 1940s evolution of bebop, since it allowed jazz musicians to create new pieces for performance and recording on which they could immediately improvise, without having to seek permission or pay publisher fees for copyrighted materials (while melodies can be copyrighted, the underlying harmonic structure cannot be).[8] In the case of "Ornithology," Parker created a new melody written over the chord progression of the standard "How High the Moon."



Basquiat's painting *Horn Players*, besides documenting this historic composition and its two leading performers, was the artist's recognition of contrafact, a concept he regularly applied to the execution of a painting. While the intent to avoid copyright and fee issues drove the practice of contrafact, this aspect was clearly not a concern to Basquiat.[9] For him, Parker's "Ornithology," with its use of contrafact, was an important and recognized esthetic precedent for key aspects of postwar painting, and especially, the work of the abstract expressionist painters. As Basquiat built up a complex narrative composition in a work such as *Notary*, executed around the same time as *Horn Players*, Basquiat began the painting by laying down a background of imagery and passages of paint on top of which he improvised with layers of additional imagery, words, and texts. In so doing, the musical breakthroughs of jazz musicians such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie were constantly being considered and adapted to his own pictorial practice.

Discography (One) and *Discography (Two)* introduced a new form of history painting. Composed solely of white text set against a black background, these two works were made soon after the creation of the two 1982–83 reversed silkscreen works on canvas, *Tuxedo* and *Untitled*. In the two *Discography* works, Basquiat takes the esthetic implications of the two silkscreens even further, introducing an entirely new type of painting into his oeuvre. In these works, text, released from its traditional function of conveying literary content, now functions as imagery.

Discography (One) and *Discography (Two)* look like the covers of record albums. These two works harken back to Basquiat's design for his own LP *Beat Bop*, which uses the same reversed image-texts as in *Tuxedo*.[10] It is unclear whether Basquiat meant these to be the front or back covers.

Each work is a list of information documenting two historic jazz recording sessions. In conceiving the appropriate means to best characterize these important moments, he turned to his now familiar graphic, white on black presentation. *Discography (Two)* documents session seven of the Charlie Parker recordings on Savoy and Dial Records. Unlike the other sessions, session seven had the twenty-one year old trumpet player Miles Davis as the session leader, with his Miles Davis All Stars. The artist not only includes the documentation of all of the performers on the session, recorded August 14, 1947, but also all of the different takes of each song recorded.

Discography (One) documents session one of the same Charlie Parker recordings on Savoy and Dial Records. This session, recorded November 26, 1945 in New York City, featured, as the top line of text in the painting states, the "Charlie Parker Reeboppers" (sic): Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Curly Russell, Sadik Hakim, and Max Roach. Both *Discography (One)* and *Discography (Two)* function as both documentation and tributes to some of jazz's musical giants. Basquiat saw both recording sessions as historic, and his now reductive pictorial esthetic became his means of insightfully recognizing their place in history.

Opposite, top to bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Discography (One), 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm

Discography (Two), 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm

Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Now's the Time, 1985
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
Diameter: 92 1/2 inches. 235 cm

Discography (One) and *Discography (Two)* are two of the very few works in Basquiat's oeuvre in which a listing of information is the entire content of a painting. While there are paintings in which a single line of text or even a single word is the main image, such as *To Repeal Ghosts* (1986), these two works are unique examples of Basquiat engaging the viewer solely with a list of facts. Revealing the artist's astute understanding of the conceptual basis for formal pictorial decisions, these works apply the legacy of minimalism to a revived focus on representational image-making.

While the two *Discography* paintings allude to LP album covers, *Now's The Time* (1985) applies similar esthetic concerns to the portrayal of an actual long-playing vinyl record. Painted some two years after the *Discography* pictures, Basquiat, with the confidence to take on an even more challenging pictorial solution, took the extra step to create a picture whose shape is one and the same with what it represents. Depicting a vinyl record, with the sole image content of the work the title NOW'S THE TIME ©, and the text PRKR, Basquiat has produced an image of the Dial Recording *Now's the Time*. On November 26, 1945, Charlie Parker led a record date for the Savoy label, marketed as the "greatest jazz session ever." Recording as

JASPER JOHNS
White Flag, 1955
Encaustic, oil, newsprint and charcoal on canvas
78 x 120 3/4 inches
199 x 306.7 cm

Charlie Parker's Reboppers, Parker enlisted Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Curly Russell, and Max Roach. "Now's the Time" was one of the featured tracks recorded on this session.

Now's the Time is one of the artist's most visceral, unusual, and original paintings. Nearly eight feet in diameter, the work's presence is established by its uneven circular shape and object-like presentation. Making the work even more compelling, Basquiat crafted the picture support in his own studio, and its irregular, sometimes awkward edge lends the piece a handmade appeal. This shape is unpredictable, nothing we have ever seen before. It is simple and mystifying. Filling up and projecting off the wall, the painting takes on the characteristics of an altar. In this context Basquiat has created a devotional object where we can pay our respect to PRKR, whom the painter often turned to for inspiration.

As with the *Discography* pictures, *Now's the Time* acknowledges the reductive esthetics of minimalism as the driving force for its highly innovative pictorial solution. Here, Basquiat has achieved an even more integrated picture, where form and content are interchangeable. As if Basquiat had applied the lessons of Jasper Johns's *Flag*, where image is matched by the shape of the picture support, in *Now's the Time*, the image and picture support are similarly interchangeable. In contrast to the elegance and precision of John's *Flag*, Basquiat's work feels almost crude. Rather than diluting the work's impact however, its roughness heightens one's engagement with the work. Having chosen a scale which significantly removes the image/object from the common object to which it refers, *Now's the Time* becomes a pictorial tribute to the epic achievement of the jazz masters whose piece of music is the subject of this picture.

Possibly the most sublime painting in Basquiat's entire oeuvre is another music painting, *Max Roach* (1984). Here again, a reductive, minimalist esthetic underlies the artist's pictorial strategy. In this work, with only the barest semblance of representational imagery and reference to music, parts of a head peer out between two drums with a cymbal to the side. The image dissolves into a background of broad passages of color. In his portrayal of Max Roach, Basquiat acknowledges the masters of abstract expressionism, de Kooning, Kline, and Rothko, and shows that the esthetic forces driving abstraction do not necessarily preclude the inclusion of representational imagery.[11]

The image Basquiat presents in *Max Roach* is unique and haunting. While revealing the bare minimum of information, the painting achieves an aura of mystery. As the viewer, we are never fully comfortable with the figure depicted. In its elusiveness, it makes us question what is before us. It conjures the music that the master Max Roach created.

What drove the jazz masters such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus and Max Roach was the attempt to capture greater freedom and innovation in their music. These musicians were essential as an artistic precedent for Jean-Michel Basquiat. What they achieved in their music validated the young painter's belief that he could achieve comparable goals as a painter. The accomplishments of these musicians gave Basquiat courage and confidence in his own struggle for understanding, acceptance and critical recognition.

Recognizing the specific esthetic achievements of the post-war jazz masters, Basquiat sought out comparable accomplishments for his own creative output. In this light, we have already mentioned the young painter's adaptation of the musical concept of contrafact. Just as these musicians found the means of playing over music and off rhythms, Basquiat layered images and texts as his chords. He emulated Charlie Parker, employing discontinuity in order to explore harmony in improvisation.[12] From this perspective, Basquiat, like Parker and Charles Mingus, was able to be spontaneous, using frenzy, but also controlled improvisation, as part of his creative process.

Installation "Basquiat"
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, July–October, 2005

In *Considering Genius*, Stanley Crouch characterizes the contribution of Charlie Parker:

> His prodigious facility was used not only for exhibition or revenge, but primarily for the expression of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic inventions, at velocities that extended the intimidating relationship of thought and action that forms the mystery of improvisation in jazz. In the process, Parker defined his generation... [13]

As he goes on to say,

> But Parker was more the gangster hero, the charming anarchist... The tommy-gun velocity of Parker's imagination mowed down the clichés he inherited and enlarged the language of jazz.[14]

It would not be incorrect to apply the same characterization to both Basquiat's methods and results. Like Parker, Basquiat demonstrated a "tommy-gun" like velocity of expression. When he was on, he was on overdrive, and nothing could come between the artist and his work. Like Parker, Basquiat leveled clichés and went straight to the truth. Applying new heights of innovation and spontaneity to a fully conceived intellectual and intuitive understanding of his subject matter, Basquiat, too, was the "gangster hero, the charming anarchist." ■

Notes

1. Ross Russell, *Bird Lives: The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker*. 1996, De Capo Press, New York, page 34.

2. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Handwritten and drawn biography. 1982, Oil paintstick on paper, dimensions unknown. Reproduced in Richard Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat*. 1992. New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, page 235.

3. Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius*. 2006, Basic Civitas Books, New York, pages 75-76.

4. *Charlie Parker*. Savoy Records, MG 9010, Volume 3, in the New Sounds in Modern Music series. 1945. Savoy Records, New York.

5. Devon "Doc" Wendell, "A Twist of Doc: The 67th Anniversary of Charlie Parker's "Koko" Sessions." Posted online on the International Review of Music; undated.

6. The author, as well as Lio Malca, both suggest that this work is possibly unfinished.

7. As evidence of its recognition, three thousand miles away from its creation, the leading record store in Los Angeles, Aaron Records on Melrose Avenue in West Hollywood stocked the record throughout 1983.

8. *Wikipedia* entry on Contrafact.

9. It does play an important part of the esthetic practice of the artists of the "Pictures Generation" such as Richard Prince, as shown in the legal issues surrounding his use of the art of Patrick Carriou.

10. *Tuxedo* was conceived in November 1982 and *Beat Bop* was released a few months later, in early 1983.

11. In this regard, Basquiat has been an important influence on a new generation of painters. As an example, the exhibition, "Variations: Conversations In and Around Abstract Painting" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, August 24, 2014–March 22, 2015.

12. Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius*, 2006, New York, Basic Civitas Books. Chapters 2 and 7.

13. Ibid. pages 69-70.

14. Ibid. page 72.

From left to right
TSENG KWONG CHI
Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, New York, 1985

GEOFF DUNLOP
Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Tony Shafrazi, New York, 1986;
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol, State of the Art, Episode 6, 1986 (screen grab)

CHAPTER 9

BASQUIAT–WARHOL: THE COLLABORATIONS

IT WAS PROBABLY TOO MUCH TO ASSUME THAT THE COLLABOrative paintings of Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, two artists as much acclaimed celebrities as they were painters, could be properly considered for their esthetic and art historical contribution. We know that both artists were excited by what they had realized, and desired that the works be exhibited in an appropriate art gallery in New York City. Soon after their completion,[1] Andy felt it was important that the works be exhibited downtown, as he thought that they captured the spirit of the newly emerging artistic milieu. Sixteen of the collaborations were exhibited at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in Soho; they received, at best, a lukewarm reception. Vivian Raynor's review in the *New York Times* sums up the public response:

> Actually, it's a version of the Oedipus story: Warhol, one of Pop's Popes paints, say a General Electric logo, a *New York Post* headline or his own image of dentures, his 25 year old protégé adds to or subtracts from it with his more or less expressionistic imagery. The results—all "Untitled," of course—are large, bright, messy, full of private jokes and inconclusive... the collaboration looks like one of Warhol's manipulations, which increasingly seem based on the Mencken theory about nobody going broke underestimating the public's intelligence. Basquiat, meanwhile, comes across as the all too willing accessory.[2]

Nothing could be further from the truth! Andy Warhol was hardly Basquiat's mentor, assisting in his rise to fame. By 1985, the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat had been widely recognized as a major new contribution to modernist picture-making. His work, beginning in late 1981 and continuing through 1984, repeatedly revealed the arrival of a new master, in full command of his vision and the means to convey it. That the critics for the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, and the powers that be—both staff and trustees of the Museum of Modern Art—failed to even make an effort to grasp the young painter's artistic contribution does not relegate him to the role of protégé of the "guru" of pop art. Raynor's comments are a devaluation of what Basquiat had achieved on his own, long before he first set foot in the Factory to work collaboratively with Andy Warhol.

In fact, it was more likely that the ever-perceptive Warhol saw in Basquiat the possibility of revitalizing his own artistic efforts, and even saw the collaborative work as a way back to certain artistic strategies that he had long ago abandoned as the creator of iconic imagery. While it may have been too early for some critics to understand what Basquiat had achieved, it was obvious to many of his astute followers that the collaborations represented nothing less than the efforts of two fully accomplished artists who

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Dos Cabezas, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas mounted
on tied wood supports
60 x 60 inches
152.5 x 152.5 cm

ANDY WARHOL and
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Olympic Rings), 1985
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
81 1/8 x 183 1/2 inches
206 x 466 cm

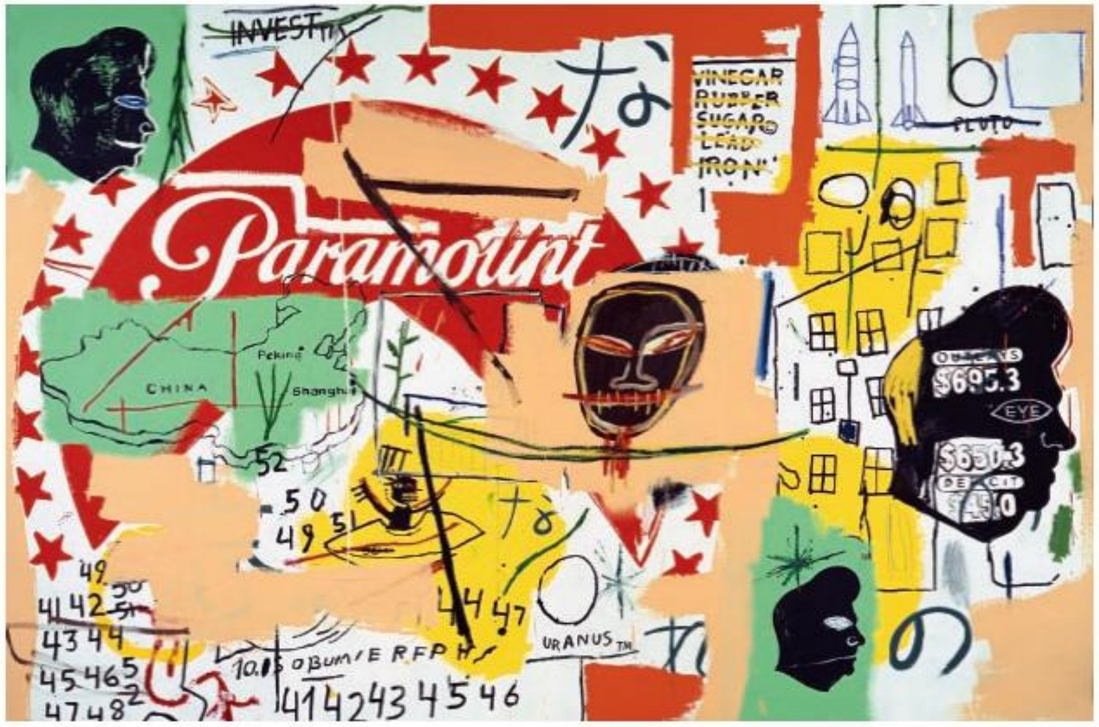
willfully joined forces in the hope of achieving something new and unexpected.

Part of the perception that Basquiat was Warhol's protégé stems from the fact that the collaborations were made at the Factory, Warhol's studio enterprise, and that the works mainly utilized silkscreen printing processes, the medium so integral to Warhol's esthetic. While Warhol clearly had the infrastructure to accommodate the scale and scope of such an undertaking, this should in no way be considered as evidence that the young artist was at the Factory to "learn the ropes" from the proven master. As demonstrated in several parts of this study, between late 1982 and mid-1984 Basquiat had regularly used silkscreen in his own studio production. Notably, *Tuxedo* (1983), *Untitled* (1983), *Back of the Neck* (1983), the silkscreen paintings produced in Venice such as *Melting Point of Ice* (1984) or *Untitled* (1984) and The *Blue Ribbon* paintings (1984) produced in New York, all prove Basquiat's mastery of the silkscreen technique. By the time Basquiat entered the Warhol studio for the purpose of jointly producing a body of work, the younger artist was on equal footing with the aging master of pop.

Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat's decision, more or less in secrecy, to collaborate on the production of approximately forty paintings, came at a turning point in each artist's career. Basquiat's meteoric rise to the center stage of the New York art world in 1982 was facilitated by the collection of his work by many of the newly acknowledged American and European collectors (including Eli Broad, Thomas Amman, Peter Ludwig, Morton Newman, Herb and Lenore Schorr, Don and Mera Rubell, Barbara Schwartz, and Barbara Jacobson); and supported by his inclusion in the 1982 Documenta, the 1984 Whitney Biennale, the 1984 exhibition, "An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture," mounted for the re-opening of the Museum of Modern Art, and his first museum exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh. By mid-1984, when Basquiat had his first show with New York dealer Mary Boone, something had changed. The freedom and innovation that had been his driving force was replaced with a greater concern for order and correctness. Basquiat continued to produce important works with a developing mastery of his technique, and he had begun to exhibit in serious venues. By mid-1984, Basquiat had become equally at home in the establishment as in the constantly evolving, always captivating, downtown culture. As he became increasingly recognized by collectors, dealers, art critics, and curators, the artist became more wary of the art world, and his place in it. The chance to align his creative energies with an established master of postwar art presented an opportunity to explore a new direction, and possibly rethink his identity.

The late 1970s through the mid-1980s were difficult years for the artist identified with the pop revolution. Andy Warhol had become acknowledged as a major artist by the critics, yet his new series of works in the 1980s failed to receive critical attention, and support from leading contemporary art collectors was waning. While collectors and celebrities turned up at the Factory to have their portraits painted, Warhol's new series of paintings, including the black on black reversals, the Marilyn reversals, dollar signs and rorschachs, were not exhibited in New York or recognized by the art media. The one exception, the shadow paintings, were exhibited at the Heiner Friederich Gallery in New York and attracted considerable media attention. The aura surrounding Andy Warhol had begun to fade; the market for new work had softened considerably. The opportunity to align his creative output with that of an emerging phenomenon from the alluring downtown culture would have been enticing to the ever-adventurous pop master.

Andy Warhol's approach to the creation of a painting was significantly different from that of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Warhol was the creator of iconic, easily identifiable images. The production of his work required an astute selection of subject matter from highly recognized source materials followed by transformation via silkscreen into a simplified, flattened image. Basquiat's practice was grounded in the progressive building up of layer upon layer of motifs and subjects into a complex, tightly interlocking field. While different, their practices were compatible, and enabled each artist to explore new possibilities for picture making. The collaborations led Warhol into the area of narrative content. From the time of the collaborations we find Basquiat fascinated with the



From left to right
ANDY WARHOL and
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Paramount), 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and silkscreen on canvas
76 3/8 x 115 inches
194 x 292 cm

Untitled (6.99), 1985
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and silkscreen on canvas
113 x 165 3/8 inches
297 x 420 cm

transformation of individual physiognomy into a more simplified, flattened-out representation of iconic types. Warhol seems to have used the collaboration as his opportunity to return to hand-painted imagery. Basquiat discovered the chance to explore further the technique of silkscreen. While the public may have initially misunderstood the reasons for these two artists to work together, the collaborations were, in fact, a nexus for them, facilitating the integration of image and text, and the creation of new iconic imagery. The project offered each artist the opportunity to expand and at the same time re-explore esthetic considerations which were the foundation of their work.

When asked about his collaborative work with Andy Warhol in Tamra Davis' documentary, *The Radiant Child*, Jean-Michel Basquiat says "Andy usually did one hit and was done." While he has a smile on his face as he makes this comment, his words are indicative of the frustration he felt with the project. With hindsight, I would suggest his frustration has more to do with how these works were received, and much less to do with the artwork. Yes, there are examples such as *Untitled ("Clearboy")* where Andy laid down two, possibly three images and then abandoned the work, leaving Basquiat to complete it. For the most part, however, Basquiat's comment on Warhol's limited participation is simply inaccurate. In many of the most accomplished works, we find multiple layers of imagery by both artists.

Bruno Bischofberger, who had initially suggested the idea of working together to both artists, summarized the two artists' contributions:

> Warhol's entire contribution was hand painted, partly in a kind of poster style featuring heraldically painted enlargements of advertising images, headlines and company logos, but partly in painterly, free brushstrokes, similar to a part of his early work of 1960-61. Basquiat was usually the second painter to work on the canvases and had fused his spontaneous, expressive and effusive iconography with that of Warhol. It was also surprising that Basquiat had used silkscreens for a large part of the paintings.[3]

Bischofberger's comments are informative, enabling us to dispose of some of the myths that have surrounded these artworks, and direct us toward their historical importance. Notably, the collaborations inaugurated Warhol's resumption of hand-painted imagery, a practice more often identified with the younger painter. These works show Warhol moving away from the practices and techniques with which he was comfortable, and for which he was known. Moreover, two artists engaging with each other in the creation of a painting would necessarily result in a layering of the work's content. The back-and-forth process inherent to a collaboration, especially as played out in many of the most dense and multilayered works in the series, show Warhol working in ways which he was unaccustomed to. Warhol's contribution to the collaborations are a record of his trust and willingness to expose himself to a challenge, even if it meant abandoning pictorial strategies which had brought him continual acclaim. Trusting and respecting each other, Warhol and Basquiat were able to achieve a cohesive integration of different styles, techniques, and imagery. These works present a free flow of information, reflecting a shared view that their joint effort would result in new associations and new meanings.

The success of the Warhol-Basquiat collaborations is obvious in several monumental works. These works include *Untitled (Zenith)*, *Untitled (1/2)*, *Untitled (6.99)*, *Untitled (Paramount)*, and *Untitled*. In these, the two artists fully engaged each other, building upon their mutual contributions. The power of these works lies in the buildup of recognizable subjects intermingled within a

ANDY WARHOL and
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Zenith), 1985
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and silkscreen on canvas
116 7/8 x 264 7/8 inches
297 x 673 cm

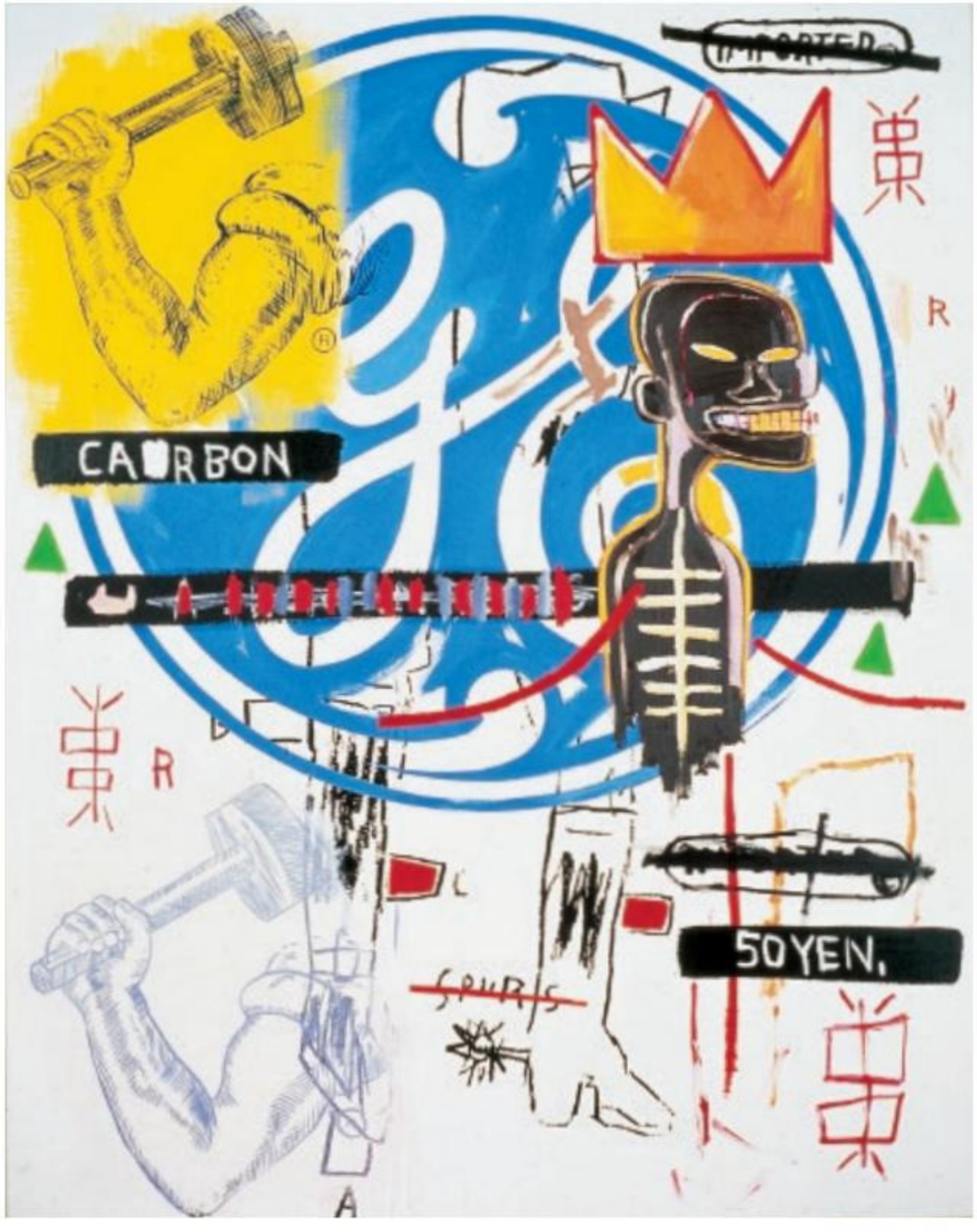
complex, multi-faceted network of abstract passages of paint. In addition, the manner in which "content" unfolds across an expansive pictorial field suggests that these works be read as passages from an event or story. In some cases, there is the inference of a socio-economic, even political point of view. These works announce a coming together, a unification of the abstract expressionist and pop esthetic visions, seemingly irreconcilable, but in fact, compatible. They prove that some of the boundaries we have set in order to define and classify post-war art are in many ways too rigid.

Untitled (Paramount) (p. 196) is one of the most complicated, fully-realized collaborations. It reads as a melting pot of recognizable images, logos, words and texts referencing a plethora of subjects. The visual backgrounds and personalities of the two artists are so seamlessly combined that the imagery we associate with each becomes indistinguishable. Instead, it is a masterful, integrated synthesis that engages the viewer. The overall effect of the work is both engaging and compelling.

Warhol started this work with a large, handpainted rendering of the landmark logo of the Paramount motion picture studio in Hollywood, followed by a portion of a map of China. Seeing these two familiar graphics as a scenic backdrop, Basquiat's response was to extend and elaborate the suggestion of a narrow, stage-like space. He added abstract passages of orange/yellow and peach flesh tones, then drew and painted a number of images, including parts of a multi-story building; a list of raw materials VINEGAR RUBBER SUGAR LEAD IRON; a series of numbers, possibly telephone numbers; a black man with outstretched arms ascending in a space ship; and the head and torso of a black figure. Warhol added three profiles of a black head, two of them set against the same green paint used in the rendering of the map of China.

A coherent, clearly defined meaning for the work's references remains inconclusive. The imagery feels neither disjointed nor random. Rather, there is a fluidity and ease of movement between these images and texts. They are like a recording of an event taking place at a unique and special moment in time, unfolding across a mysterious, unrecognizable landscape.

Untitled (Paramount) reads as a harmony of disparate images. The suggestion of glamour and celebrity associated with the Paramount logo is countered by the arresting, even haunting presence of the five figures portrayed as both symbolic vignettes (Warhol's figures) and figures in action. Although many of the individual images are flat and static, the work is active and vibrant. The viewer, looking at the painting as easily from right to left as left to right, encounters no dead or uninteresting passages of paint. Having engaged a group of figures on a stage, the



From left to right
ANDY WARHOL and
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1984–85
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and silkscreen on canvas
86 x 67 3/4 inches
218 x 173 cm

Untitled, 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and silkscreen on canvas
76 1/3 x 105 inches
194 x 266.7 cm

viewer becomes the witness to their meanderings through the web of life, both here on earth (represented by portions of buildings, commodities and minerals) as well as in the heavens above (Uranus, Pluto, rocketships).

Untitled (Zenith 1/2) (p. 203) is the collaborative work Jean-Michel Basquiat chose to keep for his personal collection. Rivaling *Untitled (Paramount)* in complexity, it is distinguished by its multi-layers of images relating to sports equipment and fitness. Filling a good portion of the work's background are images of three baseball gloves; two sports shoes (on top of which the word MOTHS was drawn); numerous dollar amounts; and one tennis racket. They are matched with texts reading like advertisements for CASUALS, EXERCISE SPECIALS, FAMOUS GLOVES and CALIFORNIA CASUALS. Playing off these images, Basquiat painted two signature black heads and a human torso with outstretched arms and hands, and a plant-like form protruding out of the figure's upper body. Completing the pictorial field, Warhol handpainted three bold images of the number "1/2," and the word ZENITH, all appearing in different fonts, and filling the foreground plane of the painting. Basquiat's heads and partial figure humanize the painting, turning it from an evocation of consumerism, ("1/2," as in one half off) into something more emotive, and possibly personal.

The arms of Basquiat's central figure reach out to the surrounding consumer products including baseball gloves, shoes, tennis racket and the texts EXERCISE SPECIALS! and

ANDY WARHOL and
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Perishable), 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and silkscreen on canvas
91 x 76 1/2 inches
231 x 194 cm

CALIFORNIA CASUALS. Just as the collaborations were a coming together of two artists of different backgrounds, pictorial interests and historical significance, Basquiat's figure, suggestive of the artist in self reflection, unifies the parts into a whole. With outstretched arms Basquiat's figure declares "he's got the whole world in his hands," assuming the role of enabling force behind the realization of the collaborations.

Untitled (6.99) (p. 197) presents a pictorial strategy comparable to *Untitled (1/2 1/2)* and *Untitled (Paramount)*. Here again, layers of imagery and text unfold across the frontal plane in a stage-like setting, describing a vague narrative. As in the other two scenic collaborations, bold expressionist-style heads move in and out of broad, abstract passages of paint in counterpoint to consumer and sports references (sales prices "5599"; "6 99;" and two football players). What is different about *Untitled (6.99)* is the inclusion of a larger-than-life, serenely haunting female nude rendered in side view, who serves as witness to the unfolding series of actions. This figure, alone among the other figures in the collaborative works, suggests that this painting is the telling of a story. While consistent with Basquiat's previous work, especially his seminal 1982 painting *Untitled (Crown Hotel)*, it is new territory for Warhol. The work is unique to their oeuvre, the narrative content haunting and mysterious.

Untitled (Zenith) (pp. 198-199), the largest collaboration at twenty-two feet in length, is a significantly different kind of picture. A balancing of the creative efforts of the two artists, this painting blends the vocabulary of pop art and abstract expressionism into a readable narrative. While the work is a far cry from the representation of a recognized subject, the work does seem to portray an event with meaning. A man out for a casual spin in his roadster passes directly beneath a looming skull and crossbones. Its speed suggested by the word ZENITH in large red block letters, the "Z" in jagged outlines, the car nears the phrase 50% OFF, and two black figures with red torsos (recalling Basquiat's *Untitled (Red Warrior)*, and raised arms. The most mysterious section of the work, on the left, is dominated by a black head facing sideways wearing a whimsical yellow and green brimmed hat. Beneath this is a stark white goat or ram in the foreground plane of the picture.

Several of the other collaborations demonstrate the ability of Warhol and Basquiat to blend pop art and abstract expressionist pictorial strategies. These include *Untitled (Win)*, *Untitled (Op Op)*, *Untitled (Mind Energy)*, and *Untitled (Aging Ali in Fight of Life)*. All of these works combine Basquiat's depictions of haunting black figures and Warhol's vocabulary of commercial graphics and symbols of consumerism. One work, *Untitled (Perishable)* warrants particular mention. In style, it is the simplest and subtlest of the collaborations. The work is composed of a sketched outline of a head and torso placed to the side of the "1/2" logo, below which is the word PERISHABLE, reversed out of a band of black paint behind a sparely rendered potted plant. In its simplicity, the work evokes a sense of mystery. The partial figure instills the work with humanity, enhanced by its proximity to a living plant. Yet the work also expresses incompleteness. Here "1/2" is not simply a reference to a product offered at a significant discount, it also suggests a state of being less than whole. As the word "perishable" signifies, and emphasized by the partially readable, crossed out text LIF IS HARD..., the artists state that our very being is fragile, constantly exposed to challenge. While *Untitled (Perishable)* is perhaps the least stylistically complex collaboration, it is the most heart-felt, exposing an underlying concern for the human condition.

ANDY WARHOL and
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Zenith 1/2), 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and silkscreen on canvas
115 3/4 x 165 inches
294 x 419 cm

AFTERTHOUGHT

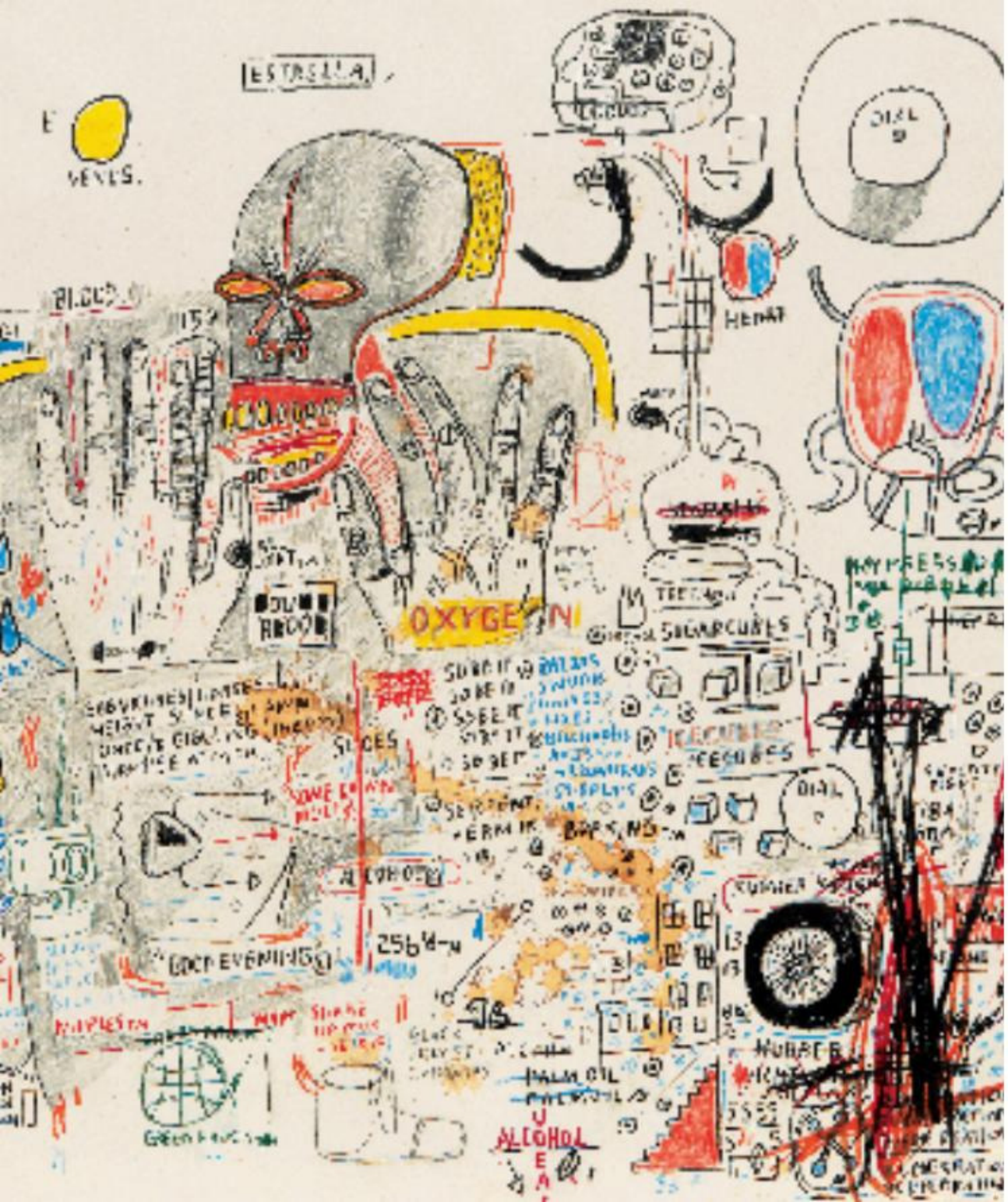
Now, more than thirty years after Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat produced approximately forty paintings together, the works can be viewed as a prophecy by a young Basquiat of how his art might be viewed, and used, in the future. His work is usually not thought of as a commentary on the culture of our consumer society. Today, however, it has fueled a global market of consumer products, decorated with imagery created by Basquiat, and available for purchase in New York, London, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Seoul and Paris, and online. T-shirts, shoes, bags, posters and even haute couture garments featuring the artist's pictorial vocabulary have become the canvases. ■

Notes

1. Actually, after the completion of the first group of works produced, there were several other works that remained in Warhol's studio, some of which were most probably not completed. Bruno Bischofberger notes:
"The larger part of the hand painted works, the later and large works by Warhol that were shown by the Estate on various occasions only after his death, seem to me to be started collaborations for stylistic and iconographic reasons, in which Basquiat's contribution is missing."
Prehistory to the Future; Highlights from the Bischofberger Collection. Electa Publisher, Milano, 2008. p. 266.)

2. Vivian Raynor, "Art: Basquiat Warhol," *New York Times*, Art Reviews, September 20, 1985.

3. Bruno Bischofberger, "Collaborations, Reflections on and Experiences with Basquiat, Clemente, Warhol." *Basquiat*. Milano,1999, Edizione Charta, page 153.



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Estrella) (detail), 1985
Oil paintstick, graphite and colored pencil on paper
29 1/2 x 41 5/8 inches
75 x 105.7 cm

CHAPTER 10

PAINTINGS ON DEATH

FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE, JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT MADE VERY few references in his work, either textural or visual, to the subject of death. It is important to counter the commonly held belief that he was obsessed with this theme throughout his career. As a careful survey of the work reveals, Basquiat did not make his own mortality a central focus until his last two years.

An early example of the artist's expression of the fragility of life, physical deterioration and ultimately death is *Acque Pericolose* (1981) (pp. 112 and 117), one of Basquiat's first fully resolved masterworks. This work, previously discussed in depth in Chapter 3 in this volume, shows the skeletal remains of a bovine-like creature next to a body of water with flies swarming overhead. A tall, reverential black male figure occupies the center of the picture, off to the left, there is a coiled snake. Basquiat's painting shows the precarious nature of the physical body from life to death, cautioning that the separation between the two is not to be taken lightly. While *Acque Pericolose* introduces the concept of death in the representation of a decaying carcass, it not the central focus or major theme of the work.

Basquiat returned to the subject of the mortality of the flesh the following year, in imagery and texts in two works: his painting *Notary* (pp. 120-121), and *Leeches*, a work on paper from *The Daros Suite*. In both, Basquiat repeats the words LEECHES, DEHYDRATION, and PARASITES. While neither the words "notary" or "leeches" makes a specific reference to death, both allude to the deterioration of man's physical being.

CPRKR

Painted on an unstretched piece of canvas, stapled and tied down to wooden stretcher bars, *CPRKR* (pp. 182 and 206) is Jean-Michel Basquiat's earliest Charlie Parker painting. Text and imagery in the painting are executed in oil paintstick on paper collaged onto the canvas picture support, on top of which the artist has added black brushstrokes that partially obliterate the text beneath. Because the work was created on such an unconventional picture support, and especially because the wood stretchers extend out several inches from the edge of the canvas, the work is an object as much as a painting. In fact, the more one considers the texts and imagery, the more it becomes clear that the artist envisioned it as a very specific kind of object. At the top he wrote the letters CPRKR, the way he often referred to the musician. Immediately below he drew a crown, and a text in list form:

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Acque Pericolose (Poison Oasis) (detail), 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and spray paint on canvas
66 x 96 inches
167.5 x 244 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
CPRKR (detail), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
60 x 40 inches
152.5 x 101.5 cm

STANHOPE HOTEL
APRIL SECOND
NINETEEN FIFTY ~~THREE~~
FIVE

Directly below this the artist drew a crucifix, and again a reference to the musician with the text

CHARLES THE FIRST
I

The structure of the work combined with imagery and text turn this picture into a kind of monument. More specifically, the painting can be seen as Basquiat's funerary tribute to Charlie Parker. In this sense, the painting takes on the function of a tombstone. Charlie Parker was found dead in his hotel room at the Stanhope Hotel in New York City. The actual date of his death was March 12, 1955, not April 2, 1955. It remains unclear why Basquiat wrote and then crossed out the year "1953," and whether he knowingly or mistakenly used the wrong date of death in his tribute to the musician. Basquiat repeated this misdating and reference to 1953 the following year in the painting *Jesse* (1983), the artist's painting honoring the legendary Olympian Jesse Owens, including the text

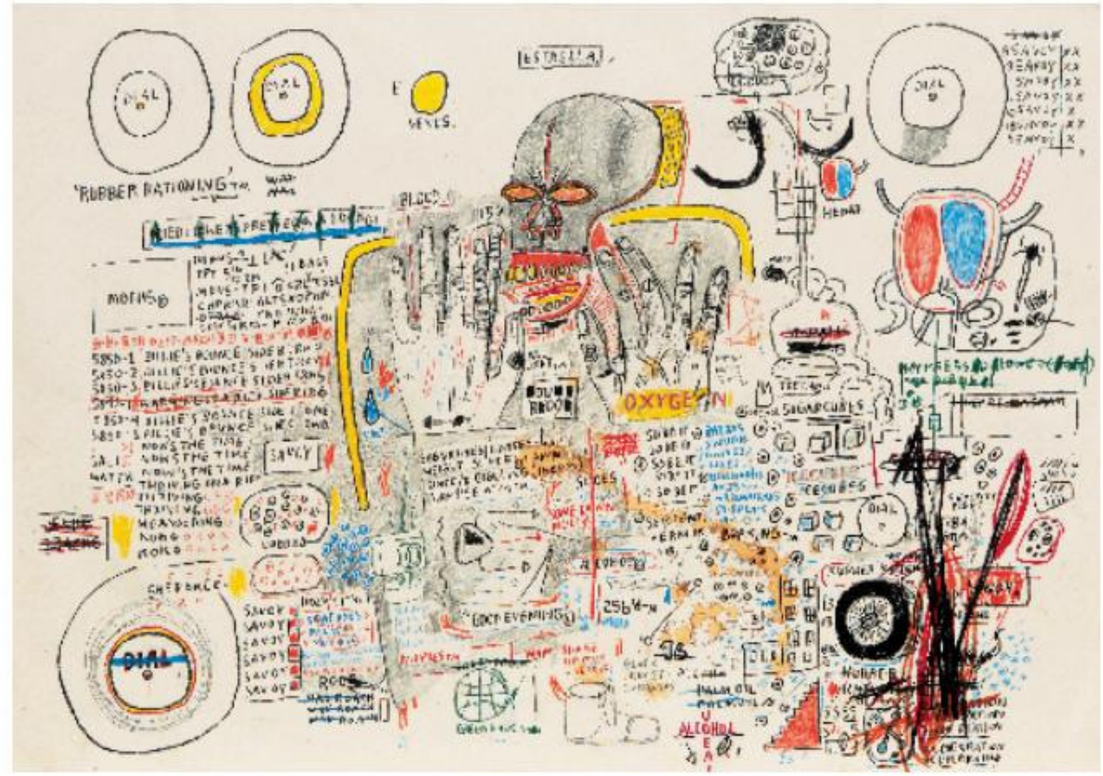
STANHOPE HOTEL
APRIL SECOND
NINETEEN FIFTY ~~THREE~~
FIVE

The image of a cross in *CPRKR* is curious; while Charlie Parker was given a Christian burial because his mother claimed his body, he was, in fact, an atheist.

UNTITLED (ESTRELLA)

Untitled (Estrella) (1985) (pp. 204 and 209) is one of the larger and more fully rendered works on paper produced by Jean-Michel Basquiat. Drawn in graphite, colored pencil and oil paintstick, the tight intermeshing of imagery and text gives this work a full pictorial statement—much like a painting. In this work, Basquiat's intent is the realization of a complex, multi-faceted iconography, like his major narrative paintings *Notary* (1983), *The Nile* (1983), and in select examples from *The Daros Suite*.

Deciphering an overall meaning of Basquiat's drawing is elusive. Historical references to jazz history and the internal and external human are both prominent. Most of



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Estrella), 1985
Oil paintstick, graphite, and colored pencil on paper
29 1/2 x 41 5/8 inches
75 x 105.7 cm

Basquiat's musical references are to Charlie Parker's Savoy recording sessions from 1945, including portions of the playlist such as *Billie's Bounce*, *Now's the Time*, *Thriving on a Riff*, *Meandering*, and *Koko*. The drawing also includes references to some of the players and their instruments on the session, and an acknowledgment of Ray Noble's tune Cherokee, the inspiration and springboard for the *Koko Sessions*: CHPKR-ALTSXOPHN (Charlie Parker – Alto Saxophone), DZZGE- P (Dizzie Gillespie – Piano), SDKHKM-P (Argonne Thorton a.k.a. Sadik Hakim – piano), MX R (Max Roach), and CHRK (Cherokee). The drawing also includes four representations of an unidentified Dial record, most probably Basquiat's reference to Parker's 1946–47 recordings on the Dial label.

In the top center of the work is a human head with the characteristics of sub-Saharan African sculpture. Rendered three-quarters view, the bald head has a smooth, broad forehead, nostrils flaring wide across the figure's upper lip, cowry-shaped eyes, vertical scarification rising from eyes to forehead and a yellow cap. Next to it, there are two hands as if seen from above. Each hand, broad and extended, is rendered with great attention to detail, especially the joints, nails, and veins running from wrist to fingers. The right hand is slightly cupped.

Basquiat's presentation of this pair of hands, positioned front and center in a declarative gesture, are his actors, asserting an active ability to "get the job done." Notably, they are placed directly in front of the viewer, a device to guide our entry into a complex array of images and references. They are similar to the position of the arms and hands of his many depictions of the young black male. In this sense, these hands are an abbreviation of the gestural presentation in a painting such as *Profit I*, or in the many works on paper with single black male figures. The same feeling of ascent or liberation—a rising up heavenward—is conveyed in these two hands. This is enhanced by the single word ESTRELLA, the Spanish word for "star," directly above the images of head and hands. In his positioning of this word, Basquiat was possibly alluding to the word's synonym: destiny. These hands are not just physically moving in an upward direction, but also represent liberation and transcendence.

The artist alludes to something quite different in two other parts of the work, where he portrays the internal human. Directly to the right of the head/hand portion of the work, the artist has rendered in cross section the passageway from the mouth to esophagus to stomach; further to the right he has depicted portions of the lumbar cavity including the lungs and their connecting passageways. Basquiat's portrayal of internal organs and portions of the central nervous system was his means of setting up a dialogue between two fundamental aspects of our being. While ascending hands symbolize the transcendental—something highly immaterial—Basquiat counters this with his representation of those portions of the human anatomy supporting sensory awareness, digestion, and breathing. Consistent with the artist's continual fascination with dualities, the words GOD and LAW, the scales of justice, black and white, here Basquiat's imagery and accompanying text allude to the intertwined complexity of human experience.

Directly beneath the right hand, Basquiat has repeated the phrase SO BE IT five times. Immediately to the right is a list of tools and weapons: RAZORS, SWORDS, KNIVES, BILLIHOOKS, AXES, ARROWHEADS, AND STIRRUPS. The phrase "so

From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
See Plate 3, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood and canvas mounted on wood
24 x 17 1/4 x 18 inches
61 x 43.8 x 45.7 cm

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict, 1982
Acrylic, oil, and oil paintstick on wood and metal
Triptych: 80 x 82 inches
203.2 x 208.3 cm

be it" is a statement of acceptance. It implies resignation and the willingness to live with a given situation even though it is not entirely acceptable, yet the tools Basquiat lists imply an ability to attack or defend oneself. Here again Basquiat suggests two actualities—those active forces enabling transformation versus the acceptance of one's situation. With the drawing's predominance of musical references to Charlie Parker's *Koko Sessions* and Basquiat's fifteen paintings on the subject of CPRKR, the work may be read as the conjunction of the history and myth of the musical giant countered by the hardcore realities of his real life, a portrait of the musician. As portrayed by the young painter, the two realities interact front and center, as the work states, in A HOLY CITY, filled with an array of temptations, enticements, and experiences. A small sampling of these references, in no particular order, include:

SUGAR CUBES DRY PRESSED FLOWERS ICE CUBES BLOOD
VENUS ALCOHOL RUBBER RATIONS OXYGEN NIPPLES
PALM OIL NUT OIL TEETH
DIRT AND WATER MIX SCARCITY WAR HISTORY
BROKEN YOUR NECK SHAKE UP YOUR LIFE

Basquiat's drawing is a portrayal of worlds colliding. He has captured not only the life of Parker, but also the ebb and flow underlying all of life's experience. The work depicts the continually evolving interaction between man's desires and his search for a higher place from which creativity flows—an "estrella"—and the constraints of the conditions binding us to our bodies and to this earth.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG DERELICT

Portrait of the Artist as A Young Derelict (p. 209) was executed sometime in late 1982. The work was produced for the artist's November 1982 exhibition at the Fun Gallery. The central section of this complex and highly unusual multi-panel construction includes the word MORTE directly above the image of a crucifix, implying that the artist's reference to death embraces human mortality. Given the title of this work, Basquiat's reference to death may have autobiographical implications.

This work of art is significant for a number of reasons. It is one of the artist's most complex, delicate, and unconventional multi-panel paintings. It is composed of ten separate wood surfaces that have been hinged, nailed or joined together, forming an irregular picture support. The inclusion of a metal door handle on the back of the work seems to indicate that the central panel was at one time a functioning door. There are two places on the front where thin metal strips link adjoining surfaces, but most of the irregular wooden pieces are attached together on the back with thin metal window hinges. The work seems casual, loosely constructed. While the artist clearly gave time and consideration to its construction, and today the work remains stable, it is nevertheless fragile.

As noted in Chapter 1, Basquiat's 1982 exhibition at the Fun Gallery included a number of paintings executed on unorthodox picture supports. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* is different. While many of the other works included in this seminal exhibition are loosely, even flimsily constructed, they all more or less conform to the traditional, rectilinear shape of a painting. In contrast, the shape of the picture support of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* is one of the most irregular in the artist's oeuvre. This is not accidental, or the result of carefree exploration. I propose that Basquiat constructed this particular support to subtly link his work to an established pictorial tradition: that of the Renaissance altarpiece. As John Berger notes in his text on the Isenheim altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald, "The altarpiece, no less than a Greek tragedy or a nineteenth century novel, was originally planned to encompass the totality of life and an explanation of the world."[2] *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* assumes a votive function. Like the altarpieces depicting Christ, the Madonna, saints and patrons in cathedrals and chapel apses that draw the worshipper from temporal existence to a spiritual higher plane, Basquiat's work helps to explain his vision of the world and proposes that the viewer approach his subject with a degree of reverential submission.

Before going further into an analysis of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*, it is important to contextualize this painting with the artist's recognized self portraits.

There are approximately fourteen definite Basquiat self-portraits, both paintings and works on paper, created around the same time as *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*.[3] Each of these can be identified as a self portrait either because of the artist's titling or the identifiable features of the artist in the image itself. If the one in the right panel of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* is a self portrait, it would be the least obvious one executed in the 1982–83 period. In most of the others, especially *Self Portrait as a Heel* (1982), *Self Portrait as a Heel, Part Two* (1982), *Untitled* (1982–83), *Dos Cabezas* (1982) and *Untitled (Two Heads on Gold)* (1982), the image, especially in the rendering of eyes and hair, suggests at least some aspect of Basquiat's likeness. In contrast, the head with open mouth and piercing eyes in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* is consistent with the artist's representations of a "generic" young black male.

Top to bottom
Installation "Basquiat"
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, July–October, 2005

MATTHIAS GRUNEWALD
The Isenheim Altarpiece, c. 1512–16
Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian; the Crucifixion; Saint Anthony the Great; Predella, the Deposition of Christ
(Overall view, wings closed)
Oil and tempera on wood
105 7/8 x 120 7/8 inches
269 x 307 cm

Because the head in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* has none of the specificity of the self portraits executed at this time, this aspect of the work does not really provide any insight into the character or personal attributes of the artist. Iconographic evaluation of the work's imagery, and the different kinds of pictorial actions undertaken by the artist in the realization of this work reveals the degree to which Basquiat was focused upon himself. Through a decoding of Basquiat's imagery and techniques, it becomes evident that self-scrutiny and self-evaluation are the subject of this work. In contrast to Basquiat's more "iconic" representations of the young black male, in which there are allusions to power, determination and conviction, the iconography of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* concerns a more mysterious and ultimately more introspective young black man.

While the work's right panel represents an individual, possibly the artist, in the left panel Basquiat's subject is graffiti culture and the art of the street. This portion of the work is composed of separate pieces of wood that have been hinged together at both top and bottom, over which is a sheet of metal. Both the wood and metal surfaces show signs of wear, as if they had been used, and were marked and tagged. While some tags were from this picture surface's earlier incarnation as a part of a window or door, other portions of graffiti imagery were made by the artist. The double "S" markings on the center piece resemble other marks and gestures found in Basquiat's paintings from this time, when he was transitioning from street to studio artist. Basquiat's complete engagement with the pictorial surface is clear in the way the metal part has been layered with paint, oil paintstick drawing and drips of paint running over the edge of the metal and onto the surrounding wood.

This is significant given the work's title, which suggests a personal statement of the artist himself. Graffiti had conflicting associations for Basquiat. While he spent time on the streets of New York, he always saw himself as an artist committed to the defining issues of modernist painting. Having earlier produced artworks signing as "Samo," when he was tagging buildings in New York City, by 1982 Jean-Michel Basquiat was exclusively immersed in the studio production of paintings and works on paper. While the entire picture support used in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* came from found materials (except the hinges purchased from a hardware store), this work was completely constructed and painted in his Crosby Street studio.

Basquiat maintained close ties to those artists who continued as graffitists and executed their creative visions on both public and private property in New York City. For Basquiat, graffiti was not only part of his artistic foundation, but also a culture he continued to embrace and support. The left panel of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* represents Basquiat's "shout out" to the esthetics of graffiti.[4] While it became less and less a part of Basquiat's art production, there are continued references to graffiti style in his paintings and works on paper, such as the "S" symbol.

The central panel of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* also includes references to graffiti culture. In this portion of the work, Basquiat's words, symbols, and images are interspersed among layers of paint against a black or grey background. Basquiat's choice of color for the background portions of this section was carefully planned. Here the artist pays homage to one of the most important realizations of graffiti art: Keith Haring's white chalk drawings

Top to bottom
GEORGE HIROSE
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring at Julian Schnabel Opening Reception, Whitney Museum of American Art, November 5, 1987

KEITH HARING
Broadway/66 St. (Subway drawing), 1982
Chalk on paper mounted on canvas
38 1/2 x 39 1/2 inches
98 x 100 cm

on the black paper used to cover advertisements in the New York City subway stations.[5]

Between 1981 and 1985, Keith Haring executed an estimated five hundred drawings on New York City subway station platforms, all during daylight hours. For these four years, as Barry Blinderman put it,

> "Having turned the Manhattan Transit Authority into his own museum of the underground, his ever-changing exhibition was open to the public 24 hours a day, for the price of a token."[6]

As Blinderman also notes:

> "It isn't stretching it to take note of where Haring chose to place his largest body of work. The multiple meanings of underground are so applicable to Haring's subway work: an avant garde—a secret, stealthy or illegal activity—a clandestine political movement—and, of course, another term for subway."[7]

In terms of its esthetic as well as socio-cultural function, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* is significantly different from Keith Haring's subway drawings. Basquiat's painting was created in the studio. The pictorial surface, beginning with the construction of the picture support, was built up progressively. Even though it conveys the impression of great spontaneity, the completed pictorial surface is the result of a systematic layering of images, words and quickly applied gestural strokes of paint. While Basquiat's techniques result in a highly resolved and compelling pictorial composition, aspects of this work are strongly reminiscent of the actions of the graffitist. Reinforced by Basquiat's reference to the urban milieu in his depiction of a skyscraper on the right edge of the central panel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* may be seen as Basquiat's tribute to his fellow artist and his radical undertaking.

Not every image or text included in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* is part of Basquiat's reflection on graffiti culture and mortality. In deciphering the many images included in the painting, we begin to recognize that when the artist undertook a work with a multifaceted iconography, he often introduced subthemes into a picture. One example is his allusion to the fruits of his labor becoming a commodity. The artist addresses the commodification of art when he writes the word SALT at the bottom of the work's central panel. As presented in this picture, as well as in several other paintings produced at this time, including *Native Carrying Some Guns*, *Amorites on Safari* (1982) and *The Nile* (1983), SALT references the historic trade of this important product. The Moors traded salt for gold in sub-Saharan Africa, wars were fought in the American colonies over salt and salt taxes. When Gandhi resided in South Africa, he led the Salt Satyagraha protesters over the production of salt, then illegal under British rule.

While Basquiat's reference to salt is an acknowledgment of its historic value in various cultures, he also links this mineral's significance to his own life as a young artist creating a product. For Basquiat, the inclusion of the word "salt" makes this connection, a product with both esthetic and quantifiable value.

CBS
Keith Haring in a New York City Subway station
Film extract from the "CBS Evening News", October 20, 1982

Tangentially, today, when the art market regularly assigns significant value to the artworks of Keith Haring, his subway drawings trade for significantly less than those works produced by him in his studio. Because the provenance of the subway drawings is difficult to determine, the estate of the artist has chosen not to issue certificates of authenticity for these works, and the auction houses have often declined to offer them for sale. Keith Haring's subway drawings are not regularly traded, and their value is difficult to assess. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*, with its allusions to these works, draws attention to the question of their value.

Unravelling the meaning of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* requires the viewer to link together seemingly disparate images and texts. Such is the case with the work's references to human anatomy. A good portion of the central panel of the work focuses on the subject of the human ankle. Throughout Basquiat's career, references to human anatomy were often featured in paintings, drawings and silkscreen prints[8] and also became the overall subject of a work. A case in point is *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits*, painted at the same time as *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*, for the artist's 1982 exhibition at the Fun Gallery. In *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits*, Leonardo da Vinci's studies of the human anatomy are the main subject of the work. Basquiat's repeated references to anatomical parts, especially the word "heel," refer to the capacities of the human body in the context of work, particularly the social, cultural and economic practice of servitude. While Basquiat was clearly fascinated with the human form, in *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits* it became a counterpoint to the representation of a black man toiling on a railroad track with a sledgehammer raised over his head. Here, the artist contrasts aspects of an idealized human being with a symbol of the physical toil and suffering mankind has unleashed upon those less fortunate.

In the central panel of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*, Basquiat drew two ankles above which he wrote THE ANKLE © and below, he repeated three times ANKLE, ANKLE, ANKLE. Positioned between images and the repeated word is a white crown floating against a darker background. It is the inclusion of this three-pointed icon which clarifies Basquiat's intent. In the jargon of the street, reference to the ankle implies the idea that "you broke his ankles," suggesting domination. In the context of street sports, Basquiat's representations of the ankle imply an offensive move to evade a defender, causing the defender to lose his balance and stare stupidly as the offensive player passes him by. Given the multiple references in *Portrait of the*

From left to right
TSENG KWONG CHI
Keith Haring and Tseng Kwong Chi's Living Room, New York, 1987

Jean-Michel Basquiat, Great Jones Street Studio, New York, 1987

Artist as a Young Derelict to graffiti culture and Keith Haring's subversive acts below the streets of New York City, Basquiat's juxtaposition of this particular part of the human anatomy and his crown was his means of heralding these artists' actions.

There are only a few works in the oeuvre with such a descriptive title as *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*. Surely the painter was aware of James Joyce's novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Basquiat was not concerned with the people, events, or historical context of the novel. He saw the compelling literary title as an inspiration for his own recognition of graffiti artists, whom he saw as cultural heroes, but regarded by society as renegades, outliers, outlaws, and derelicts. They challenged the status quo by breaking established societal codes regarding property. By 1982 Jean-Michel Basquiat was no longer tagging public spaces around New York, but he was still friends with many active graffitists. He was emotionally invested in their practice and in many ways saw their situation as his own. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* foreshadows the destiny of the graffitist, and his own fate. With this in mind, Basquiat included the word MORTE above the cruciform in the lower right portion of the painting's central panel. While the representation of the human ankle most probably alludes to victory or triumph, they are juxtaposed with Basquiat's references to death.

The allusion to death in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* became real for a member of his graffiti crew. One year after the completion of the painting, Michael Stewart, a young black graffiti artist and close friend of Jean-Michel Basquiat, was arrested and subsequently died of injuries sustained while in the custody of the New York City police. As noted by Keith Haring

> "One thing that affected Jean-Michel Basquiat greatly was the Michael Stewart story. He was completely freaked out. It was like it could have been him. It showed him how vulnerable he was."[9]
> "Jean kept saying, "it could have been me. It could have been me."[10]

In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*, Jean-Michel Basquiat equated his plight and destiny, and by extension, that of graffitists, the young derelicts with whom he so closely identified, with the historical figure of Jesus Christ at the moment of his crucifixion. In the right panel of the painting, Basquiat wrote and then crossed out the words HIC E[ST] REX.This phrase comes from the *Book of Luke* 23:38 in the *New Testament*,

> "And there was also a superscription written over him in letters of Greek and Latin, and Hebrew:
> "This is the King of The Jews, hic est rex judaerom"

This passage refers to the crucifixion of Jesus, specifically, the inscription which was placed above Jesus's head after he was nailed to the cross.

In this light, Basquiat's "portrait" or characterization of the artist is not merely that of a derelict, but also a martyr whose foresight is perceived as a threat to commonly held societal practice. Basquiat's young derelict is that individual willing to die for his vision. The painting becomes a shrine or altarpiece honoring those fallen heroes, those alienated young derelicts who are perceived as a threat to society. In an earlier time, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* could have been a painting installed on the high altar of a cathedral, replete with symbols and references heralding a fallen soul whose spirit is eternally present. In Basquiat's 1982 Fun Gallery exhibition, he placed *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* next to a small sculpture, "*See Plate 3*." This small object contains the same quotation from the *Book of Luke* as does the painting. The sculpture is in two parts: a wooden four-legged base with texts on its flat sides, above which rests a black canvas-covered box construction with texts and images on each of its surfaces (four sides and top). The HIC E[ST] REX text is on two faces of this small, highly unusual work. Given its references to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and that both painting and sculpture were created at the same time and for the same exhibition, one can speculate that Basquiat saw this small object as a companion piece to the painting. While *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict* functioned as "the high altar," "*See Plate 3*" was a more portable votive shrine honoring the vision, the lifestyle, the commitment of those street artists who were so much a part of Basquiat's life and artistic vision.

Keith Haring might have recognized the meaning as well as the accessibility of this small work, for after the Fun Gallery exhibition he acquired it from the artist. As Tseng Kwong Chi's 1987 photograph documents, for some time (possibly until Keith Haring's death, at which time it was sold), it was on the floor of the living room they shared,

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Gravestone, 1987
Acrylic and oil on wood
Triptych: 55 x 69 x 22 inches
139.5 x 175 x 56 cm

below the double portrait of Keith Haring and Tseng Kwong Chi painted by Andy Warhol.

GRAVESTONE

A few days after the death of Andy Warhol on February 22, 1987, Annina Nosei visited Jean-Michel Basquiat in his studio on Great Jones Street.[11] While Nosei did not represent the artist after 1982, she maintained a close personal friendship with him, and at this troubling moment Basquiat welcomed the visit of his former dealer. Nosei found Basquiat distraught, not just grieving for the loss of his close friend, but also saying that with Warhol's death he no longer had anyone he could turn to. Warhol's death pushed the young artist to focus his creative efforts more than ever before towards self-exploration, and ultimately self-revelation.

When Annina Nosei entered Basquiat's studio that day, she noticed a new painting/construction Basquiat had made in response to Warhol's death. It is unlike any other work executed by the artist. *Gravestone* is composed from three reclaimed pieces: a cabinet, a window, and a door, which the artist hinged together to make a three-panel painting. The materials used to create *Gravestone* are simple, and this combined with the modest size of the work and its placement on the floor (how it has always been exhibited) results in an inviting pictorial arena of great intimacy. It is completely approachable, and separates itself from many of the other constructed paintings and objects created by Basquiat throughout his career. Because the viewer is essentially asked to look down and "into" the work, it unfolds at one's feet.

Upon these readily identifiable found objects now functioning as a picture support, the artist executed several images. On the left panel is a black tulip and a cruciform. On the central panel, with no recognizable imagery, the word PERISHABLE appears twice but partially cancelled out by strokes of black paint. On the right panel, the only part with a reference to a human being, there is a skull over which appears a red heart shape. Above and to the right side of this head, there are what appear to be two orange and yellow flame shapes. The three panels, with a religious symbol, a word, and a burned out death head or mask, allude to the transitory nature of the human being. The work appears to be a votive altar, a shrine to Basquiat's fallen hero. Unlike other works by the artist, *Gravestone* is presented not with a bang but with a whimper. This simple, quiet tribute is a declaration of Basquiat's (and our) loss. *Gravestone* is an expression of heartfelt love and grief, addressing the fragility of mortal life as well as the sanctity of the soul. ■

Notes

1. It is interesting to compare the hands in this drawing to those in another drawing, *Untitled (Black)* (1983), reproduced in *Jean-Michel Basquiat Works on Paper*. Paris, Galerie Enrico Navarra, 1999, page 236.

2. John Berger, "Matthias Grünewald," *Portraits*. London, Verso Press, 2015, page 50.

3. These self portraits include:
   1. The five untitled works on paper, each 60 x 40 inches (two in the collection of Brant Foundation; Schorr Family Collection; Jerome Dahan collection; Private collection. One of the two works in Brant collection is a double portrait of the artist and Suzanne.
   2. *Self Portrait as a Heel* (1982).
   3. *Self Portrait as a Heel, Part Two* (1982).
   4. *Self Portrait* (1982).
   5. *Untitled* (1982–83), 96 x 128, (the 28-part work on paper laid down onto canvas) and *Untitled* (1983), silkscreen on canvas, 57 x 75, Edition 10.
   6. *Dos Cabezas* (1982).
   7. *Untitled (Two Heads on Gold)* (1982).
   8. *Untitled* (1982).
   9. *Untitled* (1983).

4. Very few other works by the artist have such specific focus on this subject. One other is in a private California collection.

5. The author has written extensively on Jean-Michel Basquiat's close friendship and association with Keith Haring (*Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawing: Works on Paper from the Schorr Family Collection*, 2014. New York, Acquavella Gallery and Rizzoli publishers); and evidence of that association are the several works on paper Basquiat produced depicting both himself and fellow artist, including the drawing portraying the two engaged in the boxing ring.

6. Barry Blinderman, *Keith Haring Future Primeval*. New York, 1990, page 18.

7. Ibid., page 19.

8. See *Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawing*. Acquavella, New York, 2014.

9. Quoted in Anthony Haden-Guest, "Burning Out," *Vanity Fair*, November 1988, pages 180-98.

10. Recounted to Franklin Sirmans by Suzanne Mallouk in his biographical notes for *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, Whitney Museum, 1992, page 243 and footnote 40. Also noteworthy, in September, 1983, Jean-Michel Basquiat went to Keith Haring's studio at 600 Broadway and painted directly on the wall the image of two policemen with raised batons surrounding a lone black figure. Haring subsequently cut the work out of the wall, framed and hung it in his bedroom. He named this work *Defacement* (Richard D. Marshall, Jean-Louis Prat. *Jean-Michel Basquiat*. Paris, Galerie Enrico Navarra, 2010, Vol. II, p. 179, no. 8). After Haring's death in 1990, the work was given to Nina Clemente.

11. Conversations with author 2013 and 2014.

TSENG KWONG CHI
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Great Jones Street Studio, New York, 1987

CHAPTER 11

THE LATE PAINTINGS: THE IMMORTAL LIFE

INTRODUCTION

IN ONE OF TSENG KWONG CHI'S 1987 PHOTOGRAPHS OF Jean-Michel Basquiat in his Great Jones Street studio, the artist is sitting on a box in front of a large canvas, *Untitled* (now dated 1984–87); beside it is *Gravestone* (pp. 216-217). In both the placement of the artist's left hand, raised up next to his right temple, and in the artist's gaze, intently focused on the viewer, it recalls Basquiat's staging of the photo used on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* three years earlier. Having completed *Gravestone*, Basquiat, as the photo records, was possibly reflecting upon this other painting. The story surrounding this work is complicated, for it was started several years earlier. As careful examination reveals, portions of the work were executed in silkscreen, the same process that the artist employed for the series of canvases he made in his Venice studio in the first half of 1984. While most of the 1984 silkscreen paintings are vertical in format, this work is horizontal. But given that most of the 1984 silkscreen paintings are the same dimensions as this one, and that at least one of the 1984 silkscreen paintings contains the same silkscreened text SOLAR RADIATION STREAM, we can conclude that the work in Tseng Kwong Chi's 1987 photo was begun, if not finished, in 1984.[1] Clearly, Basquiat took this work back to New York when he closed down his Venice studio. From photo documentation, it appears that in the entire right half of the painting, and possibly in the upper left quadrant of the work, Basquiat painted over his initial application of silkscreened imagery. While possibly completed in Venice in 1984, it is equally possible that Basquiat was working on the picture at the time of the photo in 1987. It is therefore reasonable to now re-date this work 1984–87.

Unlike his other 1984 silkscreen paintings, Basquiat kept this one, I think, because of its subjects and themes. While many of the 1984 silkscreen paintings have bold, highly expressionist heads and figures, and references to science, human anatomy, exotic cultures, and even space travel, this particular work also contains an unresolved diagram or schema in the upper left quadrant of the painting. Inside a series of circular and semi-circular rings are the words VICES, CONQUEST OF EVIL, GODS, TITANS, ANIMALS, and MEN. These images and words reference Dante's portrayal of Hell in his *Divine Comedy*. Of particular note are the texts SEMI CIRCLE OF DAMNATION and RISING-BIRTH, ZENITH-LIFE. Basquiat was looking at this painting while he was grieving over the death of Andy Warhol, searching for symbols and images on the subject of death and the fate of the human soul.

From all accounts, both Basquiat's physical and mental health had significantly deteriorated around the time of

Warhol's death. In turning to Dante, Basquiat found one of western culture's most highly recognized expressions of the transformation of misery into peace. "The *Comedy* does this by inviting the reader to reflect on his own feelings, showing him how to fix things and regain a sense of direction. And ultimately how to live in love and harmony with God and others."[2] While Basquiat might have found short-term relief and comfort in *The Divine Comedy*, this was not the type of source the artist would have relied on during this fragile and difficult time. Basquiat confined his references to Dante to only one quadrant of the work, and never again attempted an important painting with similar references, indicating that the Italian master's metaphors and symbols were not a match for Basquiat's reality. I propose that the work became a marker, an initiative for his subsequent pictorial undertakings. Still consumed with grief, Basquiat was ready to move forward and realize a highly personalized characterization of man's fate with the next succession of paintings: *Pegasus*, *Eroica*, *Eroica I*, *Eroica II* and *Riding With Death*, all undertaken after *Gravestone*, and the revision of the 1984–87 silkscreen painting *Untitled*.

When Annina Nosei visited Jean-Michel Basquiat in his studio after the death of Andy Warhol in February 1987, she saw the completed work *Gravestone*, and encountered the artist fully immersed in the execution of a large black and white work on paper, which, when completed and subsequently mounted onto a canvas, would be titled *Pegasus* (pp. 226-227). Moved by the death of his close friend and collaborator, Basquiat had begun to formulate the appropriate pictorial representation for his "worldview" of transcendence. Pegasus was the first of the group of paintings of Basquiat's final pictorial expression. This group of works includes *Untitled (Savoy)*, *Eroica*, *Untitled*, *Victor 25448*, *Eroica I*, *Eroica II*, *Riding with Death*, and *Dry Cell*. With the exception of *Victor 25448*, *Riding with Death* and *Dry Cell*, each of which was painted in acrylic on canvas, these late works were executed on paper on the studio floor, and after completion mounted on canvas. Each of these late paintings is large in scale and presents a rich and complex narrative content. Thematically, each focuses on transcendental themes or the subject of death.

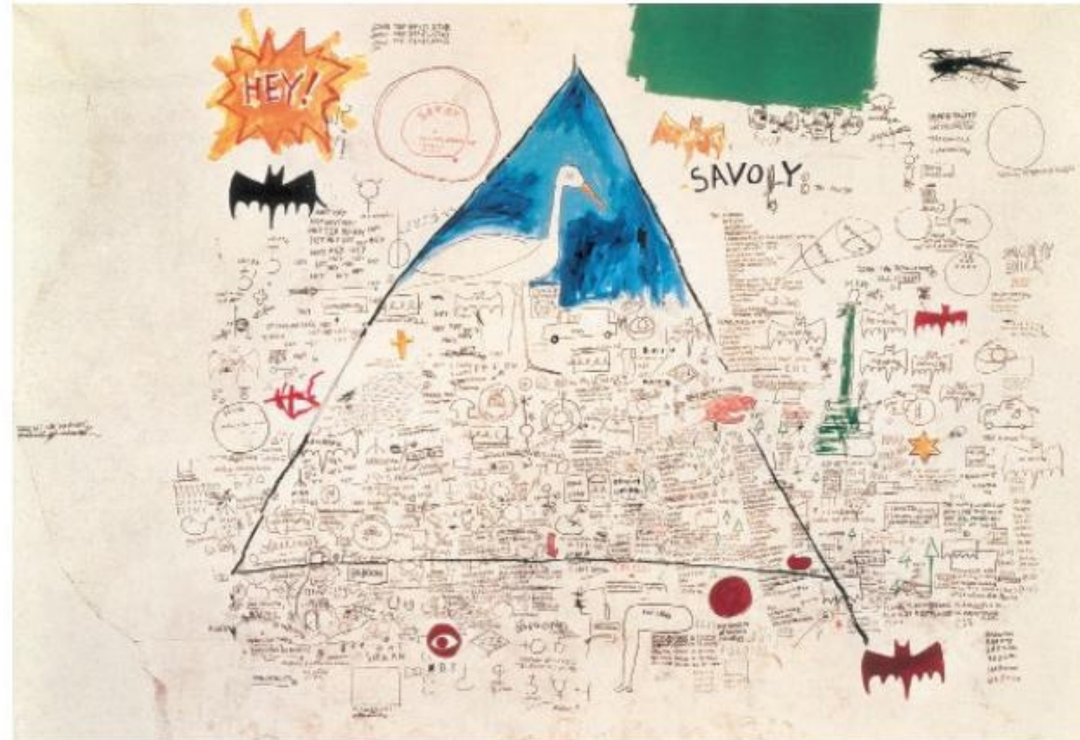
Concurrent with the production of these works, Basquiat produced a number of paintings focusing on pop culture *(The Dingoes That Park Their Brains with Their Gum* and *The Mechanics That Always Have a Gear Left Over)*, comic book figures *(Riddle Me This Batman and Jughead)*, and *popular music (Love Dub for A)*. In other paintings produced at the same time Basquiat resumes his portrayal of life on the street *(Light Blue Movers and Lester Yellow)*. All of these works present a repertoire of more "accessible" imagery. Quite possibly Basquiat felt the need to produce such a body of work in order to satisfy the demands and needs of the art market and to service those dealers who wanted to exhibit his work. Many of these works were exhibited in Europe (with Yvon Lambert in Paris and Hans Meyer in Dusseldorf).

The paintings focused on death and immortality were the basis for Basquiat's last two exhibitions in New York City, first at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in 1987, and the following year in what would be the last exhibition during Basquiat's lifetime, at the Vrej Baghoomian Gallery, in the spring of 1988. One might conclude that Basquiat felt it was important to save his transcendental vision for his New York audience. While the presentation of popular imagery serviced the world's need for "Basquiats," the artist never lost sight of his "higher" goals. The execution of the more existential pictures required an enormous amount of time, and the concentration, questioning, and especially self-reflection required to execute them could only be sustained in a limited number of artworks.

UNTITLED (SAVOY)

Untitled (Savoy) is the largest and probably one of the first paintings executed on paper on the studio floor after Warhol's death in 1987.[3] It should be viewed as a transitional work for Basquiat, as he explored the central themes of his final paintings. *Untitled (Savoy)* does not feel fully developed. It includes a number of important textual references, which taken together provide a degree of insight into Basquiat's state of mind at this time. The work represents a shift in Basquiat's thinking. As much as it concerns the mortality of the body, it commences the roll out of Basquiat's "road map" of his worldview.

Basquiat's texts in the painting JOHN THE REVELATOR, ECKHARTHAUSEN, MAN DIES, and ASCENT all indicate a shifting away from the physical world, and a focus on something less tangible. While an alternative reality is alluded to, it is not matched by a pictorial rendering making the subject seem credible. "John the Revelator" refers to a traditional gospel blues call and response song very influential in the formative history of American blues. Reflecting the plight of the southern Negro in the early part of the last century, this song is an expression of the burdens of oppression as well as the passion of Christ, relieved by a transcendence of the physical and the recognition of higher self. "John the Revelator" also refers to the portrayal of the plight of the American Negro in Basquiat's work *The Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta*. In *Untitled (Savoy)*, however, the structuring of the work only partially supports the themes



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Savoy), 1986
Acrylic and oil paintstick on paper mounted on canvas
94 x 136 1/2 inches
239 x 346.5 cm

and subjects. In retrospect, the painting serves as an indicator of where Basquiat was headed, but falls short as a fully resolved presentation of a transcendental worldview. The portrayal of the here and now, and its transcendence, is simply not made credible. In contrast to the limitations of *Untitled (Savoy)*, many of the works presented in Basquiat's final two New York exhibitions match worldview and pictorial presentation.

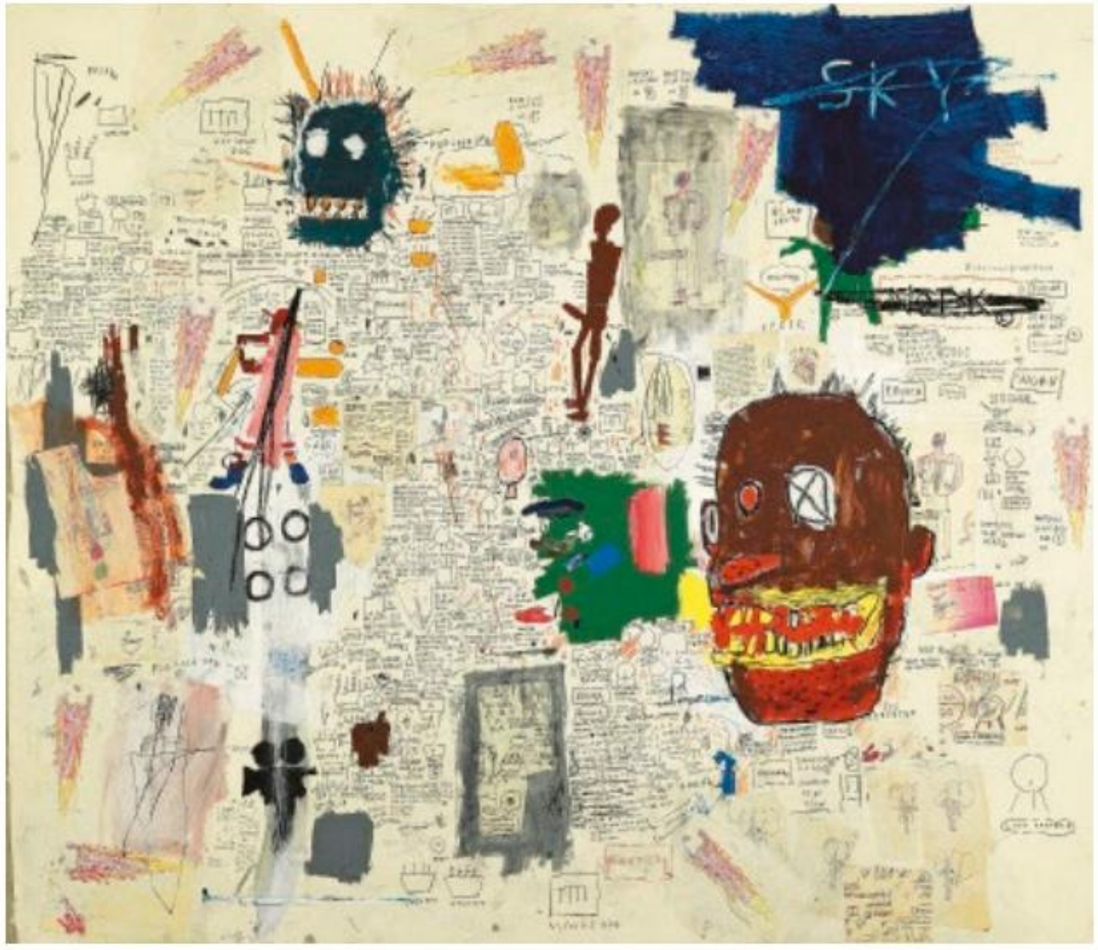
VICTOR 25448

Victor 25448 (pp. 222-223) shows the residue of a pop art sensibility resulting from the artist's collaborations with Andy Warhol. In fact, one could argue that in Basquiat's portrayal of a fallen figure he is depicting his hero and friend. Most probably motivated by Warhol's passing, and painted shortly after *Gravestone*, this figure is more likely a reflection upon the artist's own state of being, his own fragility at this key moment. In support of this conclusion it is noteworthy that Basquiat included *Victor 25448* in his final New York exhibition with *Riding with Death*, *Eroica I* and *Eroica II*.

The dread and foreboding alluded to in *Untitled (Savoy)* turns into the representation of an individual's downfall in *Victor 25448*, where Basquiat's figure falls backward, arms extending overhead as legs thrust forward. Both pose and gestures suggest that the figure is no longer grounded or capable of supporting its weight. Basquiat's figure is not only falling, but in a state of deterioration. There is a bandage across the figure's cheek and an "X," perhaps a patch indicating the loss of sight, across its right eye. Basquiat's representation of human degradation, and possible loss of life is further suggested in the texts placed adjacent to his figure, NOTHING TO BE GAINED HERE, FATAL INJURY, and FLEAS.

In contrast to *Gravestone*, *Victor 25448* counterposes physical loss with references to a more hopeful state of being. While a falling figure occupies a significant portion of the picture's frontal plane, a central position is given to the word

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Victor 25448, 1987
Acrylic, oil paintstick, wax, and crayon on paper mounted on canvas
73 x 133 inches
185.5 x 338 cm



From left to right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1987
Acrylic, oil paintstick, graphite, colored crayon, and photocopy collage on paper mounted on canvas
90 x 107 inches
228.5 x 272 cm

Eroica, 1987
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on paper mounted on canvas
90 x 107 inches
228.5 x 272 cm

IDEAL, repeated three times across the top of the work, a counterpoint to both texts and image directly below. Possibly, the placement of a repeated, large scale, pop-art-charged word juxtaposed with an expressionist-style figure suggests the continuation of the artistic strategy implemented in the Basquiat-Warhol collaborative artworks.

Victor 25448 can be divided into two contrasting and complementary parts. While the lower portion of the work presents a narrative of an individual's "fall" or demise, the top alludes to an elusive yet attainable state of being. The pictorial division in *Victor 25448* is reminiscent of the same artistic strategy Basquiat employed much earlier in his career in *Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers)* (1982), in which he physically divided the work into two sections with a similar relationship. *Victor 25448* is an expression of the duality Basquiat returned to throughout his career, and represents the harmonization of pictorial strategy and conceptual content.

EROICA

On May 23, 1987, three months after the death of Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat exhibited three works at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery. *Untitled*, *Untitled*, and *Pegasus* are large (the first two are 90 x 107 inches and *Pegasus* is 88 x 90 inches). Each work was executed on paper on the artist's studio floor, and only after completion mounted to canvas. In each work, the word EROICA is repeated throughout the pictorial field.

Basquiat's first use of the word "eroica" occurs in a two part 1983 oil paintstick drawing on acetate, the two works intended as the original artwork for a silkscreen print. The silkscreen print, in which the two drawings are joined together was never released as a limited edition, and was only produced as a trial proof.[4] It is an amalgamation of images and texts, many of which refer to experiences, encounters and observations the artist had while he was residing in the Venice beach community. Along with the words and texts GOLF SHOES, CORNFLAKES, INVISIBLE SMOKE, HOW TO PERFORM STRONGMAN TRICKS WITHOUT STRENGTH, FATMEN, and CLAMS, Basquiat included the word EROICA. This word does not appear in any other paintings or works on paper from this time. In the print, the word EROICA is next to the short phrase HOW TO PERFORM STRONGMAN TRICKS WITHOUT STRENGTH. This phrase refers to the weightlifters Basquiat would have watched on Muscle Beach, only a few steps from the door of his Venice studio. As the producer of the silkscreen, and having closely worked with Basquiat at that time,

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Pegasus (details), 1987
Pegasus, 1987
Acrylic, graphite, and colored pencil on paper mounted on canvas
88 x 90 inches
223.5 x 228.5 cm

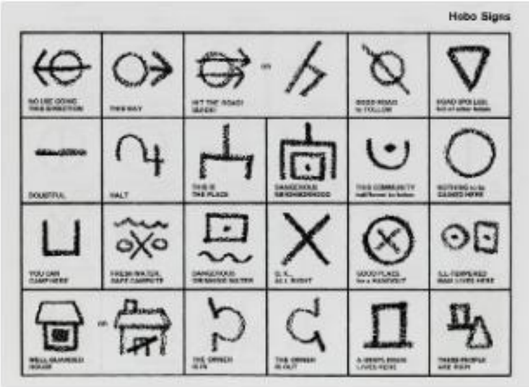
I recognized the artist's inclusion of the word "eroica," which means "heroic," as his recognition of the feats of the body builders he had observed, which he saw as heroic. In this early part of his career, Basquiat's inclusion of this word is not an expression of a formulated worldview concerning the subjects of death and the transcendental.[5]

Untitled (1987) (p. 224) is one of the artist's last paintings in which the human head is the main subject. In contrast to the artist's earlier depictions of the male head, this image is much less a portrait or likeness of a specific individual, but is instead a psychological portrait. With a patch over the left eye, and clearly missing several teeth, this large, expressive brown head with mouth and teeth rendered in red and yellow shows the artist focused on the fragility of the human body. As also portrayed in *Victor 25448*, here Basquiat's subject becomes human mortality. This conclusion is enhanced by the recurrence of the short phrase NOTHING TO BE GAINED HERE. The work recalls Basquiat's panoramic portrayal of a life in *Untitled (Estrella)*, his portrait of Charlie Parker. Including many of the themes and references of the Charlie Parker work, this much larger painting becomes an epic portrayal of the forces affecting human life. While the subject of the earlier work on paper is clearly the musician, and only by inference a reflection on Basquiat's own life, we may speculate that *Untitled*, with its references to the fragility of the human body, is a portrayal of the artist's own state of being as he entered the "post Warhol" phase of his life. The repeated inclusion of the word EROICA may suggest a shift in how Basquiat perceived himself. While *Untitled* is still primarily focused on the state of one's physical being, its repeated reference to "eroica" implies another experience transcending the confines of the artist's physical and psychological condition.

PEGASUS

> "Every one of these titles (*Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver's Travels, The Pilgrim's Progress and Alice in Wonderland*) contains a leading character whose fate is to go on a journey, and whose mettle is tested in the process. Each explores a different landscape, or body of water, but all traverse what you might call the valley of the shadow of life, profuse with incident."[6]

There are very few clues about how *Pegasus* was executed.[7] Most probably, Basquiat began at the bottom of the sheet of paper and worked his way up. The application of black acrylic paint at the top was clearly applied after the completion of the entirety of the text/image rendered in graph-



ite and colored pencil. If there is any clue affording us insight into the artist's method of operation, it is those few places where one image or line crosses over another. Supporting the conclusion that Basquiat worked from bottom to top, in each place where this occurs, the imagery closer to the top is drawn on top of the image and text beneath.

Pegasus gives the impression that Basquiat was exercising a self-assigned task to fill a sheet of paper with text and imagery. He gave equal importance to each word, phrase or image. Each element is presented without qualitative distinction, and is not more or less meaningful in the work. There are places where he crossed things out. The act of deletion is not a break in continuity or a devaluation of what was originally drawn, but a different kind of information, of no lesser or greater meaning.

Understanding *Pegasus* may at first seem difficult. The painting includes references to scientific fact, specific geographical locations, body parts and functions, historical figures and places, pop culture, household appliances, and psychological conditions. The viewer is invited to meander through it, as if in a maze. Basquiat has provided subtle, yet effective devices to direct the viewer. It has a definite sense of directionality, inviting the viewer to move from bottom to top. In one portion of the work the words ASPHALT, SCHARZ, EROICA, and the short phrases BROKEN WING, HEART AS ARENA, MADE IN CHINA and SO IT WASN'T PETROL are stacked one on top of another, suggesting an upward pathway. Supporting this directionality, Basquiat has placed among his text-image "stackings" the occasional diagonal line. In many cases, alongside these diagonal lines the artist has written the word ANDROMEDA, indicating that a certain kind of liberation or freedom accompanies the viewer's experience of ascendance. This assurance is reinforced in other ways. In the top center section of the work there is a ladder. Recalling the use of this same motif in *Tuxedo*, which implied ascendance, here too the insertion of the ladder image has a similar function. There is a slight lessening in the density of the information presented in the top half of *Pegasus*. Accompanying the greater separation of imagery and text is the feeling of more "breathing room."[8] In the midst of this, Basquiat has scattered the words EROICA and PEGASUS. While both are in the lower part of the work, they appear significantly more times at the top, suggesting ascendance and liberation, the completion of a life. At the top, there are no texts or visual references, simply a passage of black paint extending across the top of the pictorial field.

Other features of *Pegasus* merit consideration. The work avoids the presentation of a logical or ordered narrative content; we cannot assume that our consumption of multiple pieces of information will result in our understanding it. While we may seek and expect some kind of resolution, Basquiat's way of structuring words, texts and imagery negates the use of our deductive/rational capacities. Rather, Pegasus serves as a reminder to let go, acknowledging that our experience is non-judgmental, from moment to moment. Central to the achievement of this end result, the artist infused his text-imagery with an airy feeling, with space. The viewer may even experience a sense of lightness in this work.

In *Pegasus*, Basquiat wrote and framed the word PEGASUS inside a rectangular form about thirty-five times.[9] In Greek and Roman mythology, the figure Pegasus is a white, winged stallion, and represents the "springs of the ocean or the wells." Pegasus is the carrier and the protector that guards the spirit in its journey to the stars. Pegasus symbolizes the spiritual energy, knowledge, and inspiration by which mortal beings gain access to a higher state of being or more fundamental truth. Carl Jung went even further, seeing Pegasus as the healing force or power through which mankind resolves the polarities and oppositions present in the human psyche.

In Basquiat's painting, the word PEGASUS is placed alongside references to objects, machines, materials, places, historical events, scientific processes, natural phenomena, natural substances, and people. In this context, the word PEGASUS suggests a guide, pilot, or captain who enables our navigation through the physical and psychological human experience. With no obvious or well-defined path, the journey is full of stops and starts. Like being lost in a maze, the way home is never guaranteed. Basquiat makes the journey fanciful and laborious, filled with surprise and discovery.

Basquiat's *Pegasus* depicts a landscape of the mind as it processes stimuli, both physical and psychological. As a metaphor for the mind, *Pegasus* harkens back to *Untitled* (1981), Basquiat's richly expressive large head. It is his earliest portrayal of cognition, and ultimately self-realization. *Pegasus* goes even further, creating a profound visual equivalent of the mind's capacity for self-exploration and ultimately self-understanding. He achieves this through the metaphor of a landscape. But the landscape depicted

Above, from left to right
HENRY DREYFUSS
Hobo Signs and Hobo Symbol reproduced in *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols*, 1972, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Opposite
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Ascent, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm

in *Pegasus* is not traditional; it has no color. This makes sense as soon as we recognize that the subject of *Pegasus* is the internal experience of the mind. As a landscape, Jean-Michel Basquiat has shown an expansive roadmap with many paths and directions. Just like the constantly fluctuating mind, none of the paths are more or less important. With a bare minimum of signage and direction, Basquiat leads us upward and ultimately into the black area filling the top edge of the painting. While this part of the painting might allude to the state of death or dying, I suggest that the overall reading of the painting is the representation of our true nature. No longer attached to the functions of the body, the thinking mind, and the emotional being, we reside in a deeper, non-transitory sense of self. From this state of being we are capable of partaking of phenomenal experience free of the need to identify with anything in particular, without the desire to declare "this is me, and this is what gives me meaning or satisfaction."

While *Pegasus* contains many characterizations of physical form, past experiences, memories and associations, this is not what ultimately fascinated Jean-Michel Basquiat. Rather, he represented these phenomena to show us how the mind creates our sense of who we are. As a traveler making our way through *Pegasus*, we experience a virtually uncountable number of phenomena. Some are more easily identifiable than others. Some seem "user-friendly," others feel less comfortable. We not only observe these phenomena, but also mentally seize them, seeking to link them to our past and future. Some fulfill our expectations, others do not. In all cases we turn to these references to the phenomenal world for validation. But the journey is multi-dimensional, and in its complexities the phenomena change, as do our needs and expectations. Ultimately, what *Pegasus* so convincingly captures is the ever-changing nature of the phenomenal world, and the unreliability of this kind of experience as a gauge for identity.

Among the references in Pegasus, Basquiat included the hobo symbol for "man dies." Richard Marshall was the first writer to recognize Basquiat's use of hobo symbols:

> In Henry Dreyfuss's *Symbol Sourcebook*, Basquiat discovered a section on "hobo signs," a complete lexicon of signs and symbols that hobos (an earlier generation of the homeless) used to communicate with each other. They left chalk or crayon signs on fences, walls and doors, which conveyed messages such as "dangerous neighborhood," "easy mark," "sucker," and "vicious dog here."[10]

The next year, the hobo symbol "man dies" became a featured reference in *Eroica I* and *Eroica II*. While the symbol for "man dies" and the repetition of the text shows the artist's focus on finality, death is not the central theme of *Pegasus*. While we have identified the artist's concern for this subject throughout his short career, and the death of Andy Warhol as a turning point for Basquiat's subject matter, concluding that *Pegasus* is merely concerned with human mortality would overlook the larger meaning and fundamental contribution of this work of art. Focusing solely on the theme of death in the late works of Jean-Michel Basquiat does not reveal the entire story. As first fully realized in *Pegasus*, and then extended and elaborated on in several of his final works, Basquiat's focus on death was complemented by a portrayal of immortality.

Basquiat's approach to the subject of human consciousness was intuitive. He was entirely self-taught; what he understood stemmed from his own experience. His insights, understanding, and opinions resulted from many days, months, and years of observation. The artist possessed neither the discipline nor the dedication of the spiritual seeker, but the meaning of *Pegasus* and the teachings of spiritual masters converge. The Buddhist understanding of individual identity becomes meaningful. In the teachings of the Buddha, the human being is perceived as five "piles of form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness."[11] Form indicates the full array of physical phenomena, both inside and outside the body; feeling involves both pleasure and pain; perception concerns our need to label and identify objects; fabrication implies those active processes of the mind: intention, attention, evaluation, and judgment; and consciousness focuses on the experience of the six senses, including the sixth sense, the intellect.

In a number of ways *Pegasus* addresses these five subjects. Whether a symbol, image, word, or phrase alluding to a physical phenomena, a reference to a psychological state of being, or the workings of the senses, Basquiat focuses on those forces affecting our understanding of who we are. The message of *Pegasus* is that each of these forces is transitory in nature, not something that we can rely on as we attempt to determine what is really "real" and who we "really" are. As we make our way through *Pegasus*, just as we make our way through our experience of life, each force that we turn to, try to hold on to, believe in or cherish, fails to fulfill our expectation of constant comfort and satisfaction. Our journey through Basquiat's "arena of consciousness" reminds us that every experience along the "pathway" fails to fulfill our unquenchable need for answers. Responding to each challenge, temptation or enticement, we ultimately reply "not this, not that." At some undetermined moment, and as a *Pegasus* signals, we no longer identify with or rely upon the five facets of human consciousness. *Pegasus* represents the recognition and understanding of this fundamental truth.

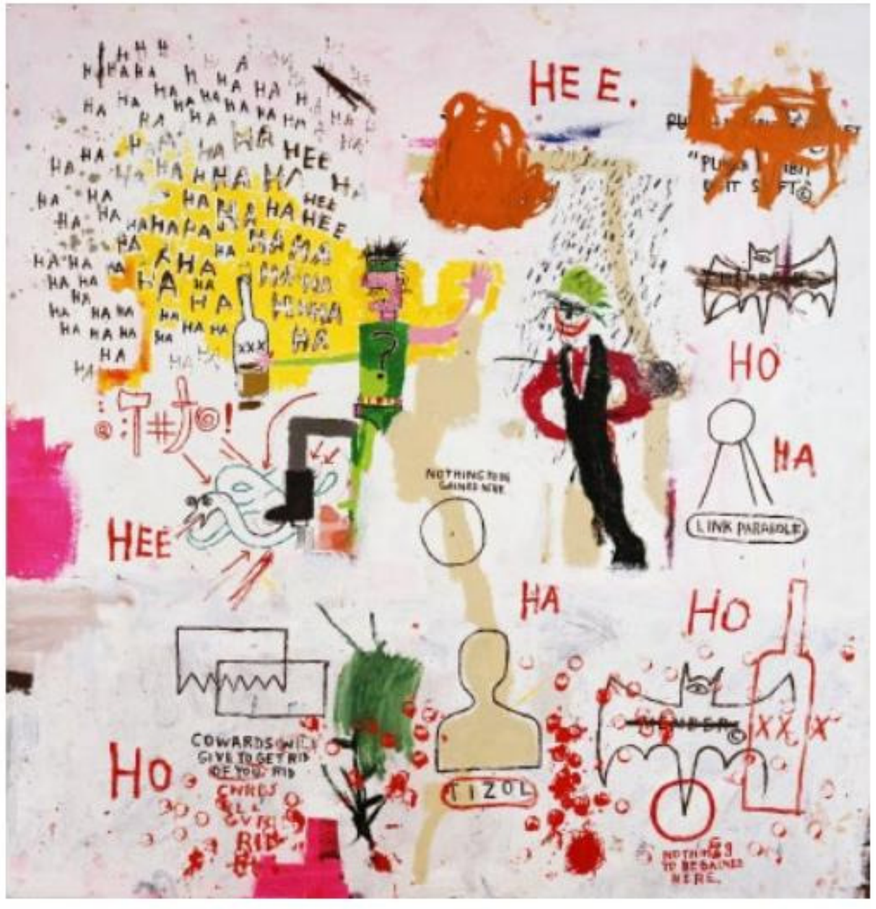
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Heaven, 1985
Oil, acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on wood panel mounted on wood
80 x 33 x 3 inches
203 x 84 x 7.5 cm

ACTION FIGURE/COMIC BOOK PAINTINGS

Both *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* were painted for Jean-Michel Basquiat's April 29, 1988 exhibition at Vrej Baghoomian Gallery in New York. This exhibition would be the artist's last exhibition during his lifetime. In addition to these two works Basquiat painted *Victor 25448*, *Riding With Death* and *Dry Cell* for this exhibition. Together with *Pegasus*, these were the artist's fullest expression of his vision of death and immortality.

Also included in the exhibition were *The Dingoes That Park Their Brains with Their Gum* (p. 233) and *The Mechanics That Always Have A Gear Left Over*. These pictures were more in keeping with the paintings Basquiat had exhibited in Europe a few months earlier with the Yvon Lambert Gallery in Paris, and Hans Mayer in Dusseldorf. These paintings primarily focused on the presentation of popular comic book and TV figures, including Batman and Robin, Superman, Popeye, Bullwinkle, Daffy Duck and Jughead. In these works, Basquiat resumed an interest in a subject matter that he had sporadically turned to throughout his career. Basquiat was especially fond of *Flash in Naples* (1983), depicting Flash Gordon and his sidekick. Not only was this work part of his personal collection, but he also included it in his first major museum exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh in 1984. Made at the same time as *Flash in Naples*, *Piano Lesson*, and *Television and Cruelty to Animals* also include images of Batman and Robin, Superman, Popeye, and Bullwinkle. Basquiat regularly included the Superman logo in both paintings and works on paper throughout his career, including the major, multi-panel narrative painting *Life Like Son of Barney Hill* in which Basquiat depicts a flying red-caped figure with the Superman logo emblazoned across his chest as the central subject of the work.

While Basquiat's earlier use of comic book figures was part and parcel of his daily immersion in popular culture, his return to these images in the works painted for his final exhibitions also signaled something different. In contrast to the factors motivating the earlier works, I propose that the late comic paintings became a means of escape from the death of Andy Warhol. These figures enabled Basquiat to reconnect with an earlier, less stressful and painful part of his life. It is also noteworthy that the paint handling in the late action figure paintings is significantly different from many of the artist's well-known works. One of Basquiat's acknowledged achievements was his facility with paint, essentially assimilating and extending the esthetic accomplishments of Willem de Kooning and Robert Rauschenberg. But the application of paint in many of the late pop-comic paintings feels



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Riddle Me This Batman, 1987
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
117 x 114 1/4 inches
297 x 290 cm

fragmentary and choppy. *Riddle Me This Batman*, *Unbreakable*, *To Be Titled*, *Jughead* and *Love Dub For A* lack the fluidity and cohesiveness of the earlier work. Disparate images in these works feel isolated from each other. In some cases, the paint is much thicker, and colors, rather than fluidly integrated with adjacent areas, feel stuck in their place. There are exceptions, such as *Ideal*, *The Dingoes That Park Their Brains with Their Gum* and *The Mechanics That Always Have a Gear Left Out*, in which the presentation of a group of figures set against a solid field of unbroken color secures a certain degree of pictorial cohesiveness. In the ones that have fractured, thick, sometimes crudely applied colored shapes, something seems to be missing. The brushwork in these pictures suggests a lack of passion. While the figures in *Riddle Me This Batman* are highly intriguing, for the most part the late action paintings fail to achieve the intensity and immediacy we have come to associate with the artist.

Concurrent with the dilution evident in some of the late action figure paintings, Basquiat expanded his pictorial accomplishments. Presenting an exhibition in New York City must have served as the stimulus, for the three pictures Basquiat exhibited with Tony Shafrazi in 1987, followed by the majority of the pictures presented the following year at Vrej Baghoomian, reveal an artist fully engaged and on target. Exhibiting in New York City pushed Basquiat in ways that showing in Paris and Dusseldorf could not.

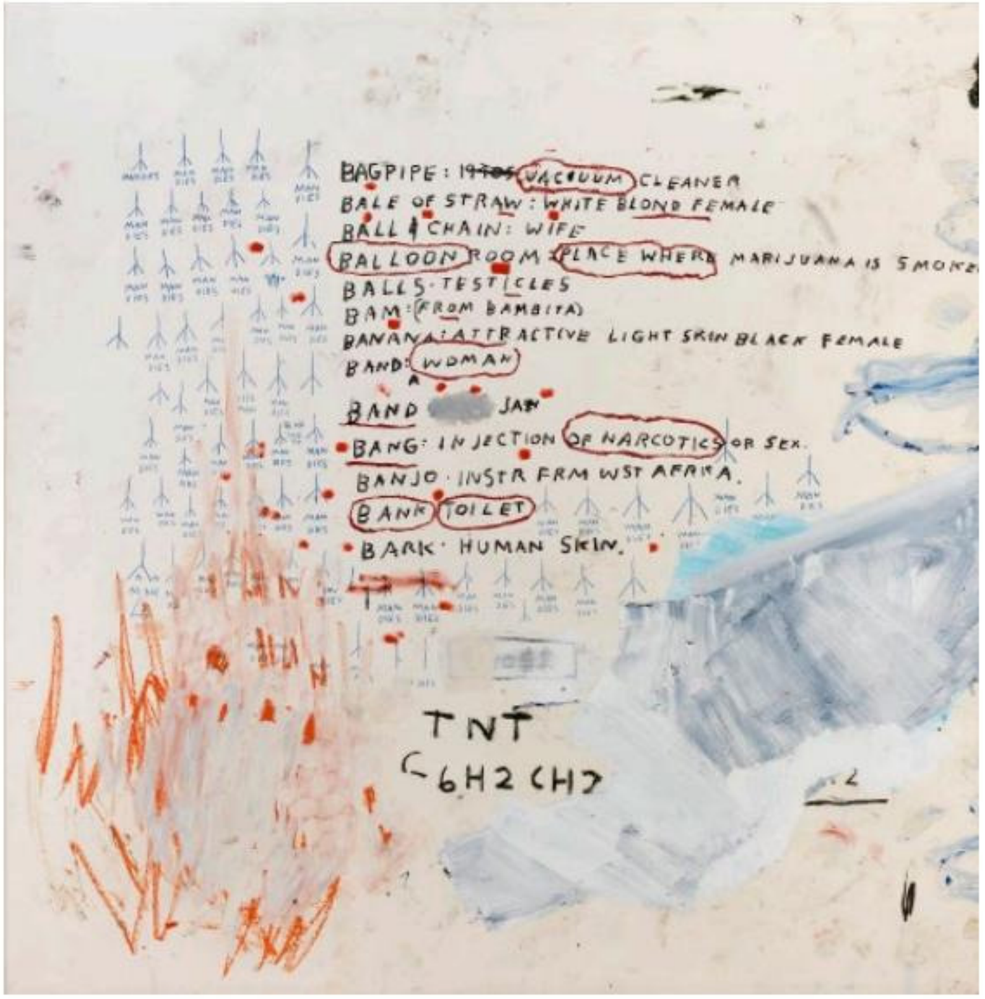
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
The Dingoes That Park Their Brains with Their Gum, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick on linen
100 x 114 inches
254 x 289.5 cm

EROICA I AND EROICA II

Eroica I and *Eroica II* (pp. 234 and 235) are much more abstract paintings compared with the literal, descriptive-figurative elements in *Pegasus*. Composed of non referential marks, a repetition of symbols, words and short phrases, as well as broad gestural passages of paint, the imagery in these two works suggest a shift away from our lived experience into something more ethereal. *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* portray a non-physical, intangible atmosphere.

One of the predominant images and references in both *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* is the phrase MAN DIES, and the hobo symbol for it. In *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* the theme of death takes center stage, particularly in *Eroica II* in which both the symbol and phrase are repeated over the upper half of the painting, weaving in and out of a pictorial field made up of abstract scrawls suggesting atmospheric effects and a list of words all beginning with the letter "B." In *Eroica I*, both hobo symbol and phrase are less frequent, and larger. Here again, they are positioned alongside a "B" list of words and phrases with the addition of three deep-orange shapes, possibly suggesting sweet potatoes. Symbols, images and texts all hover beneath a large, abstract and thickly rendered passage of grey-blue paint, perhaps representing a formation of clouds. *Eroica I* includes the repetition of the word EROICA throughout the upper portion of the work.

In *Eroica I*, the words EROICA and MAN DIES are presented in counterpoint, the duality of man's physical finality



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Eroica II, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on paper mounted on canvas
90 1/2 x 88 3/4 inches
230 x 225.5 cm

countered by a higher state of being. Together, *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* present the complementary themes of death and immortality. While the underlying subject of *Eroica II* is man's mortality, *Eroica I* alludes to our immortality. Most publications have reproduced *Eroica I* before and to the left of *Eroica II*. Clearly taking their lead from Basquiat's titling of the works, publishers, curators and writers have assumed that *Eroica I* should be presented before *Eroica II*.[12] While installing the two works at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in the 2005 Basquiat retrospective, it became obvious to me, the curator of that exhibition, that both visually and thematically the works needed to be reversed, placing *Eroica II* to the left of Eroica I. Installed like this, the abstract passages of paint actually move across and connect the two works.[13] Placing *Eroica II* before *Eroica I* supports the view that Basquiat envisioned the two works first referring to death followed by a state of being he identified with the word EROICA.

Viewed in this way, the works together suggest a narrative. *Eroica II*, representing earthly phenomena, presents the letters TNT and the chemical composition $C_6H_2CH_3$ of this explosive, and the artist's "B" list of references to

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Eroica I, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on paper mounted on canvas
90 1/2 x 88 3/4 inches
230 x 225.5 cm

physical properties, places, and states of being. With the words and phrases BARK, HUMAN SKIN, BANG, INJECTION OF NARCOTICS, and SEX, Basquiat may be alluding to aspects of his own life at that time. While *Eroica I* also includes physical and material references, they are far fewer. In addition, some of the words and text of this painting, such as GAS, AIR COOLED, CONDENSER, and BEAM TO SUN, characterize immaterial phenomena. While the inclusion of the phrases FOR BLUES and FIXINTODIEBLUES still firmly ground this work in the harsh realty of one's mortality, these references are now offset by the repetition of the word EROICA. Placed in the upper portion of the work, eroica suggests the experience of being suspended above the physical in the midst of a more elusive realm.

In undertaking these two seminal works, Basquiat never envisioned them as presenting a clear, concise and rational narrative in which the viewer can easily or seamlessly move from "step 1" to "step 2." Both works strongly suggest that the artist was consumed with his own mortality and in this regard, both need to be viewed as a premonition of his demise. Nonetheless, taken together, *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* become more than a characterization of man's

Installation "Basquiat"
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,
July–October, 2005

mortality. Like *Pegasus*, they show Basquiat's belief in the possibility of transcending that state of being.

RIDING WITH DEATH

One of the most haunting characteristics of *Riding with Death* (p.238) is the work's austerity. The two figures and the background are so sparely rendered that this aspect of the work warrants consideration. The central image of a figure seeming to straddle the back of a four-legged creature is taken from Leonardo da Vinci's allegorical composition of a woman on the back of a skeleton on all fours, as if the skeleton is transporting the riding figure.[14] The concept of a skeleton carrying a human figure, and the specific rendering of the skeleton, show Basquiat turning to Leonardo as his source of inspiration. Basquiat closely follows Leonardo's drawing in the positioning of the skeletal figure's front legs, and particularly the bend and placement of the right forearm. But Basquiat's rider significantly diverges from that of the Renaissance master. While Leonardo's figure is clearly female, the sexuality of Basquiat's figure remains uncertain. Basquiat's image is more simplified. In contrast to the linearity of Leonardo's figure, Basquiat has rendered his figure as a solid mass with vitality. The figure's arms and legs are engaged in the act of guiding the skeletal form on which it rides.

As Basquiat has not represented his skeletal creature's back, his rider hovers over the space between the four-legged animal's front and back legs. Basquiat's lean and fit figure floats, suggesting an athletic dancer's balancing as it maneuvers its way across a vaguely defined pictorial space. It is lively, strange, and alien. While the figure's left leg is in profile indicating that its body is facing forward, the shoulders, chest and head are parallel to the picture plane as if facing the viewer. Shifting 90 degrees between legs and torso, this image recalls Basquiat's cubist-inspired, multi-directional head drawings from 1982.

Other parts are more schematic. While the figure's left leg and thigh are fully rendered, the right leg is only partially portrayed, reduced to a group of lines extending from the figure's right pelvic region. The two arms are also reduced to several lines extending out horizontally from the sides of the torso. While the left arm extends towards the viewer, the right arm is on a diagonal, ending in a series of strokes of white paint suggesting that the hand and/or fingers of this limb are directing the figure towards an undetermined location. While both arms appear sketchily rendered, they convey the effect of animation, perhaps the effort to maintain balance or stability while the figure is being transported. A sense of vitality is also captured in the figure's torso. Basquiat has painted the figure's ribs with a series of white brushstrokes against its brown skin, expressing movement within the chest cavity. This figure is neither emaciated nor feeble, but alive and actively engaged as an equestrian.

Basquiat's figure in *Riding with Death* recalls the figure in the earlier painting *Pharynx* (1985) and the related work on paper. The central figure in *Pharynx* is based on an image of the royal portrait from the Dende-maro at Rusape, Rhodesia in Burchard Brentjes' *African Rock Art*, a source, as previously noted, which Basquiat turned to for earlier paintings and drawings.[15] What both the figure of *Riding with Death* and *Pharynx* share is the relationship of the figure's legs with the positioning of the torso. In both works the figure's thigh and leg are shown from a side view, while the torso faces directly toward the viewer. In both works the figure is twisted, with torso, shoulders, arms and head moving off axis from hips and legs. There is a second similarity between the figure of *Riding with Death* and *Pharynx* in the depiction of an elongated arm ending in a series of simplified lines for fingers. In both works, and as clearly the intent of the original Rhodesian rock art source, bodily distortion results in a feeling of dynamism, and by implication regal stature. In choosing this image, Basquiat turns his equestrian figure into an expression of power, authority and fearlessness.

At first glance, and as suggested by the work's title, the subject of *Riding with Death* is human mortality. But the figure portrayed in this work is an active, fully engaged, dynamically functioning human being. The figure is neither passive nor in an act of submission or surrender. That Jean-Michel Basquiat died only months after the completion of the work might support the suggestion that the work is a prophecy of his impending death. I suggest an alternative interpretation, reading the work as an expression of an individual dealing with the adversities then consuming his life. Basquiat's figure hardly projects defeat. While Basquiat's figure is being carried along by a creature from another world, he is managing the situation. Even if he is partly under the control of this four-legged beast, he does not succumb to death. The red, elliptical form resembling a halo hovering around his head suggests that the figure riding on the back of death is at peace with himself, residing in a higher realm.

A careful reading of Basquiat's figure allows for a reconsideration of the artist's intent. While it portrays mortality, it is also an expression of the fearlessness necessary to deal with adversity. *Riding with Death* is an expression of the artist's unconditional affirmation of life, and with this, his acceptance of death. *Riding with Death* is the visual documentation of the artist's commitment to this worldview. Even if it portends the artist's death, it is not an expression of remorse or grief. If the work alludes to finality, Basquiat's figure acknowledges another reality.

DRY CELL

> "In the museums infinity goes up on trial"
>
> Bob Dylan
> "Visions of Johanna"
> *Blonde on Blonde*

After installing his exhibition at the Vrej Baghoomian Gallery in SoHo on the morning of April 29, 1988, Jean-Michel Basquiat exited the gallery and ran into his father, Gerard Basquiat, who had come by to see his son's latest exhibition. The painter told his father that he was returning to his studio to complete an additional painting he wanted to include in the show. Basquiat returned to the gallery several hours later with a large painting, still wet, titled *Dry Cell* (p.241). It has been the popular opinion that *Riding with Death* was the artist's final work. The existence of *Dry Cell*, with Gerard Basquiat's account of the circumstances surrounding its creation, contradicts this.[16]

We gain some insight into Basquiat's mind at the time of his final exhibition in the words of Glenn O'Brien:

> "He always pushed it. He never stopped working. How else do you make a life's work in seven years? It was scary beautiful, like the Flying Wallendas. It was scary at the end. I went by the studio every day when he was making the last show that played at Baghoomian Gallery. He didn't want to make that show. He felt under the gun, he was under the microscope at the wrong time. The press was biting at his heels. He wanted to cancel. He thought that the press had built him up just to tear him down. He was paranoid. But then he pulled off another miracle."[17]

Ever since the death of Andy Warhol, Basquiat had been edging closer toward the examination of his own life.

Above
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Riding with Death, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas
98 x 114 inches
249 x 289.5 cm

Opposite page, left
Illustration (extract) from
Royal Portrait from
the 'Dende-Mara' at Rusape,
Rhodesia in *African Rock Art*,
by Burchard Brentjes, 1969,
J. M. Dent and Sons Limited

Opposite page, right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Pharynx, 1985
Acrylic, oil paintstick
and photocopy collage on canvas
86 x 68 inches
218.5 x 172.5cm

Through his engagement of the medium of painting, Basquiat had become aware of a greater, deeper sense of himself. For some, the realization of oneself is achieved through classical religious practice, for others through more unconventional practices such as yoga, meditation, or philosophical inquiry. Basquiat's "practice" took place in his studio, and the pursuit of self was the underlying motivation for *Pegasus*, *Eroica I*, *Eroica II*, *Riding with Death* and *Dry Cell*. Undertaking his 1988 exhibition with Vrej Baghoomian provided him with the necessary impetus to pursue this goal. He could get away with other kinds of paintings for an exhibition in Paris. His New York exhibition required the fullest possible commitment to expressing who Jean-Michel Basquiat was at this critical moment in his life. Painting and exhibiting these works wasn't really a choice. The expression of his insights was a matter of responsibility.

Pegasus may be seen as Basquiat's expression of how we create our sense of reality, of how we come to see ourselves as the aggregate of our body, feelings, perceptions, thoughts and consciousness. *Riding with Death*, *Eroica I* and *Eroica II* are expressions of one man dealing with his mortality. Reflecting on these three pictures, Basquiat realized that there was still something more he needed to say. While they, along with *Victor 25448*, deal with the impermanence of our bodies and minds, Basquiat knew that he needed to also convey his awareness of a deeper sense of self. *Dry Cell* is the artist's expression of this realization. The work concludes the cycle, presenting in a simple, declarative image that it is through the mind that one comes to discover one's true self.

Basquiat returned to his studio with a mission. With a limited amount of time until his opening, he could not produce a work with layers of applied and reworked imagery. Always resourceful, Basquiat sought out the appropriate pictorial solution for the direct expression of his statement. He found it in a large, haunting ape-like figure seated on its haunches with front arms pushing away from a circular shape and staring directly out toward the viewer. The gaze of this simple, roughly drawn primate, set against a solid yellow ground, challenges the viewer to deal with his presence.

A large ape staring down the viewer is atypical in Basquiat's oeuvre. However, in context of the other works included in his last exhibition, *Dry Cell* must be seen as fully resolved.

The presentation of such a simplified and concise image guaranteed that the focus of the work would rest in its declarative content.

Buddha describes the human mind as being filled with drunken monkeys, jumping around, screeching, chattering, carrying on. Basquiat's depiction of an ape was his means of pointing us towards the mind as the ultimate vehicle through which we can perceive our true nature. Having explored the limitations and finality of the body, sensations and perceptions first in Pegasus, followed by *Riding with Death*, *Eroica I* and *Eroica II*, in *Dry Cell* the artist turns the focus entirely toward the mind. While Basquiat's ape is an expression of the mind's restlessness, it is equally an expression of its capacity to lead us to self-understanding. To the degree that this creature appears not only agitated but also lost, it serves as the artist's message that only by shedding one's attachment to those transitory, ever-changing aspects of our being, can we come to know our true nature. This image delivers a powerful, positive and hopeful message.

Basquiat's ape functioned as his means, as Joseph Campbell articulated,

> "... of arousing and maintaining in the individual a sense of awe and gratitude before what is, and will forever remain the mystery of being, the mystery of the universe, and of oneself within it."[18]

One way to come to the knowledge of that mystery is by recognizing the limitations of what our perceptions and sensations believe to be reality. *Dry Cell* declares that neither the body, feelings, nor thoughts are a reliable verification of our true nature. The creature depicted in this work points the way toward an alternative way in which to experience the world. Basquiat has placed his primate against a yellow-ochre ground, essentially shrouding this creature in a color signifying a transformation of consciousness. Basquiat's choice of color for the background of *Dry Cell* recalls the color of the robes worn by Buddhist monks in some Asian cultures. As expressed in Jean-Michel Basquiat's final work of art, we are servants of a ferocious, uncontrollable mind. As he declares, he who masters the mind, the source of seemingly endless and furious chaos, masters the duality of life and death. Basquiat's ape points the way towards liberation.

T. S. Eliot writes in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

> "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.[19]

Jean-Michel Basquiat's career is a testament to the veracity of T.S. Eliot's insightful statement. From his immersion in the world around him, Basquiat learned how to turn the process of observation upon himself. The works Basquiat presented in his last two New York exhibitions reveal an artist fully in touch with man's capacity for self-understanding.

While Basquiat's corpus of work is testament to his search for self, he still had to live in and deal with the real world. His daily, lived experience was his constant test, regularly challenging his faith and belief.

As T.S. Eliot noted,

> "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[20]

The art of Jean-Michel Basquiat is a testament to the process of self-sacrifice in order to reveal greater truth. Basquiat restores art to its highest (and historical) position as an acknowledgment of man's birthright. As James Joyce put it, "The supreme question about a work of art is out of how deep a life does it spring."[21] The art of Jean-Michel Basquiat was continually driven by the artist's overriding need to provide an answer to that question. Basquiat's art went "deep" as he expressed what he discovered. Basquiat never lost his way. His entire creative life was a continual pursuit of self-realization; his final works give us a glimpse into who we really are. ■

Notes

1. In the Vrej Baghoomian photo archive there is a photo of this work with the date 1987. The existence of this photo suggests that the artist most probably consigned the work to the Baghoomian Gallery sometime after it was photographed in Basquiat's studio.

2. Rod Dheiter, "Dante's Path to Paradise," *Wall St. Journal*, April 19, 2014, page C1.

3. The dating of this work remains a question. The Whitney Museum catalogue dates the work 1987, while both Shafrazi and Navarra date it 1986. The repeated image of a bat, the repeated inclusion of the word HEY, as well as the image of a duck most likely place this work in 1987—at the same time that the artist executed *Riddle Me This Batman* and *Love Dub for A*. In addition, the hobo symbol and words MAN DIES place the work as being executed around the time of *Pegasus*.

4. The two drawings on acetate were created by the artist in Venice, California in the first months of 1983. The acetates were joined together, making one image, which was turned into a single silkscreen image, and two trial proofs were then made. The artist never produced the edition.

5. The word EROICA next appears in an untitled, large scale 1985 painting. In this work, distinguished by the repeated photocopied image of a crocodile laid down on the canvas picture support, the word occurs over and over, integrated in a field of words, phrases, and images.

6. Anthony Lane, "Go Ask Alice, What Really Went on in Wonderland," *The New Yorker*, June 8 and 15, 2015, page 48.

7. *Pegasus* finds its closest precedent in *Untitled* (1982–83, 96 x 126 "), the predominantly black and white work on paper, which, like *Pegasus*, was laid down onto canvas. Like *Pegasus*, *Untitled* consists of texts, words, symbols and images unfolding over a pictorial field. While the text images in some sections of *Untitled* are very dense, others are much lighter and airier. The work is an expansive field of information juxtaposed with a head, possibly the artist. In contrast, the information presented in *Pegasus* is much denser, filling up the entire pictorial field. While *Untitled* reads as a figurative image set against a ground of words and texts, *Pegasus* is a landscape painting in which the artist has virtually negated all figure-ground distinctions. The equanimity as well as density with which Basquiat has presented his "information" is what distinguishes this work.

8. *Ascent* (1982–83, acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, crayon, charcoal and pencil on paper, 22 1/2 x 30 inches) one of the series of thirty-two drawings executed in 1982–83 from *The Davos Suite*, depicts a centrally positioned black figure with an upraised left arm positioned immediately below the word ASCENT. Directly above the word are two upward pointing arrows, and immediately beneath the figure Basquiat drew a portion of a ladder. Taken together, the figure, the word ASCENT and the ladder allow the viewer to read the work as implying some form of movement. Basquiat's concern, however, is not physical movement. Rather, for him ascent implies a transcendence of the physical and the recognition of a more subtle, illusionary realm. This is made evident in the inclusion of the words FLESH/SPIRIT positioned immediately below the drawn ladder; as well as the multitude of references to mystics including PLOTINUS, ST. JOHN THE REVELATOR, and EKHARTHAUSEN, all men whose teachings were focused on the supremacy of a higher self. While Pegasus does not include any references to historical or mystical figures, it too includes the same pictorial devices alluding to ascendance.

9. The only other word repeated throughout the work is "eroica."

10. Richard Marshall, "Repelling Ghosts," *Jean-Michel Basquiat*. Whitney Museum, New York 1992, page 23. The author both cites and reproduces images from Henry Dreyfuss, *Symbol Sourcebook*. New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc, first published in 1972 (McGraw Hill Book Company), pp. 90-91. Marshall also shows Basquiat's use of hobo symbols in the 1984 painting *Trophy*, *Eroica I* (1988) and the 1987 drawing *Untitled*.

11. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Five Aggregates: A Study Guide*. 2010. Accesstoinsight.org.

12. When the artist installed the two works in his 1988 exhibition, they were not exhibited next to each other.

13. As Lio Malca astutely noted to the author in conversation in New York in 2005, in all probability the two works were at one time joined together, and the artist cut the single sheet of paper in two.

14. Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegorical Composition*, in the collection of Christ Church College, Oxford, England.

15. Richard Marshall was the first author to note Basquiat's use of this source.

16. Gerard Basquiat conveyed this story to the author in several conversations throughout 2012. He said that sometime during the run of the exhibition, Jean-Michel gave the painting to him, and that the painting remained in the gallery after the exhibition closed. After the closing of the Vrej Baghoomian Gallery in 1992, its inventory was conducted by the bankruptcy court. After Gerard Basquiat's deposition and testimony before the court, the painting was awarded to Gerard Basquiat (documented in the deposition of Vrej Baghoomian and court records of bankruptcy court proceedings.) Dry Cell is currently in the collection of Nora Fitzpatrick.

17. Glenn O'Brien, "The Show Must Go On," *Man Made Jean-Michel Basquiat*, Sotheby's catalog from its selling exhibition of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, 2 May–9 June, 2013. New York, 2013, page 7.

18. Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That, Transforming Religious Metaphor*. Novato, California, New World Library, 2001, page 24.

19. T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays*. New York, Dover Books, 1997. Quoted here from internet text: PoetryFoundation.org.

20. Ibid.

21. James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler. New York, Vintage Books, 1986; Chapter 9: "Scylla and Charybdis," page 152.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Dry Cell, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick
on canvas
102 x 114 inches
284.5 x 289.5 cm

SYLVIA PLACHY
Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1986

LIST OF WORKS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

ALL WORKS BY JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
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Cover
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (detail), 1983
Oil paintstick, pencil, crayon, and gouache on paper mounted on canvas
96 x 126 inches
244 x 320 cm

Back cover
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (detail), 1983
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
57 5/8 x 75 1/2 inches
146.4 x 192 cm

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Black, 1986
Acrylic, oil paintstick, photocopy collage, and wood collage on panel
50 x 36 1/4 x 8 1/2 inches
127 x 92 x 21.5 cm

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Jazz, 1986
Acrylic, oil paintstick, photocopy collage, and wood collage on panel
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127 x 92 x 21.5 cm

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
This image is adapted from the artist's 1982 handwritten biography, known only through reproduction

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Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1982
© Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee

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EDO BERTOGLIO
Jean-Michel Basquiat on the set of *Downtown 81*, 1980–81
Photos Edo Bertoglio
© New York Beat Films LLC
Courtesy Maripol

Pages 14 and 15
EDO BERTOGLIO
Jean-Michel Basquiat on the set of *Downtown 81*, 1980–81
Photos Edo Bertoglio
© New York Beat Films LLC
Courtesy Maripol

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Self Portrait as a Heel, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
50 x 40 inches
127 x 101.5 cm
Collection Peter Morton

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Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
96 x 61 1/2 inches
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© 1999 Christie's Images Limited

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Jean-Michel Basquiat Standing over Painting, 1983
© Roland Hagenberg

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Acrylic and oil paintstick on paper mounted on canvas with tied wood supports
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Jean-Michel Basquiat Painting Gold Griot, Venice, CA, 1984

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Jim Crow, 1986
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
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GLENN O'BRIEN
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Madonna, 1981–82
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Jean-Michel Basquiat, Venice, CA, 1983; *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, 2010 (screen grab)
© Tamra Davis

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Installation "Basquiat"
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Jean-Michel Basquiat, Great Jones Street Studio, New York, 1985
© Lizzie Himmel

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JEAN KALLINA
Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1983
© Jean Kallina

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ROLAND HAGENBERG
Jean-Michel Basquiat's Studio on Crosby Street with Bar Stool, 1983
© Roland Hagenberg

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GIANFRANCO GORGONI
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Crosby Street Studio, New York, with *Made in Japan I*, 1982
© Gianfranco Gorgoni

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
57 5/8 x 75 1/2 inches
146.4 x 192 cm

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Oil paintstick, pencil, crayon, and gouache on paper mounted on canvas
96 x 126 inches
244 x 320 cm

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TAMRA DAVIS
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Fred Hoffman, Venice, CA, 1983; *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, 2010 (screen grab)
© Tamra Davis

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TAMRA DAVIS
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Fred Hoffman, Venice, CA, 1983; *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*, 2010 (screen grab)
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Photograph of Jean-Michel Basquiat for *The New York Times Magazine* (cover), February 10, 1985
© Lizzie Himmel

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The New York School Painters, November 24, 1950; published in *Life Magazine* "The Irascibles," January 15, 1951

Top right
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Uniqlo garment tag for SPRZ/NY/MOMA clothes, 2015

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Decoded, 2010
Reproduction of pages 90–91 with detail of Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Charles the First*, 1982

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Fred, 1983
Acrylic, spray paint, oil paintstick, photocopy collage, and paper collage on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 96 x 74 inches
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The Hoffman Family Collection

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Charles the First (detail), 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
Triptych: 78 x 62 inches
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Bottom
Market Street, Venice, CA, Larry Gagosian Residence, Jean-Michel Basquiat's studio, 1982–84

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Jawbone of an Ass, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Emok), 1982
Acrylic, oil, and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
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212 x 152.5 cm

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Baby Boom, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
49 x 84 inches
124.5 x 213.5 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

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TSENG KWONG CHI
Jean-Michel Basquiat under One Million Yen, Fun Gallery, New York, 1982
Photo by Tseng Kwong Chi
© Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Yellow Tar and Feathers), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, paper collage, tar and feathers on masonite
Polyptych: 96 x 90 inches
244 x 228.5 cm

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ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Collection, 1954
Oil, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, wood, metal, and mirror on three canvas panels
80 x 96 x 3 1/2 inches
203.2 x 243.8 x 8.9 cm
Collection San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, USA
Gift of Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson
© Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York

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In Italian, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and marker on canvas mounted on wood supports
Diptych: 88 1/2 x 80 inches
225 x 203 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT

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The Nile, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 68 x 141 inches
172.5 x 358 cm

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Piscine Versus the Best Hotels, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 62 1/4 x 82 3/4 inches
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The Schorr Family Collection

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HENRI MATISSE
Luxe, Calme et Volupté, 1904
Oil on canvas
37 x 46 inches
98.5 x 118.5 cm
© Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Gotham News, 1955
Oil on canvas
69 x 79 inches
175.3 x 200.7 cm
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, USA
Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1955
© 2017 The Willem de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Photo Credit: Albright-Knox Art Gallery / Art Resource, NY

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick and spray paint on canvas
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Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

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ANDY WARHOL
Gold Marilyn Monroe, 1962
Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas
83 x 57 inches
210.8 x 144.7 cm
© 2017 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Gold Griot, 1984
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
117 x 73 inches
297 x 185.5 cm
The Broad Art Foundation

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Grillo, 1984
Oil, acrylic, oil paintstick, photocopy collage and nails on wood
96 x 211 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches
243.8 x 537.2 x 47 cm
© Fondation Louis Vuitton/Marc Dommage

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Man with Hat), 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
59 1/2 x 40 inches
151 x 101.5 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

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YOSHITAKA UCHIDA
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Akira Ikeda Gallery / Tokyo, November 9, 1985
© Akira Ikeda Gallery, Japan

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Untitled (From a Suite of Fourteen Drawings), 1981
Ink, crayon, and acrylic on paper
Each: 30 x 22 inches
76 x 56 cm

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Grid), 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
23 1/2 x 17 3/4 inches
58.5 x 45.5 cm
The Schorr Family Collection

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EDWARD KEATING/NEW YORK TIMES PICTURES
Children playing the street game "Skelly," Beekman Avenue, Bronx, New York, 1995

Bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1981
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
79 x 111 inches
200.5 x 282 cm
Collection Annina Nosei, New York

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and spray paint on canvas
86 x 104 inches
218.5 x 264 cm
Collection Stephanie Seymour Brant

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Untitled, 1981
Acrylic, marker, paper collage, oil paintstick, and crayon on canvas
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La Femme qui pleure (Weeping Woman), 1937
Etching, aquatint and drypoint on paper
30 1/2 x 22 3/8 inches
77.5 x 56.8 cm
© 2017 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

YORUBA CULTURE
Mask, Nigeria
Wood
Height: 9 7/8 inches, 25 cm
Private collection
© Paul Freeman / Bridgeman Images

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick and graphite on paper
22 1/2 x 28 1/2 inches
57.2 x 72.4 cm
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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
40 x 60 inches
101.6 x 152.4 cm
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA
Fractional Gift of Sheldon Solow
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

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BETH PHILLIPS
"Jean-Michel Basquiat Drawings," Robert Miller Gallery, New York, 1990
© Beth Phillips

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Famous Negro Athletes, 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
22 7/8 x 35 inches
58 x 89 cm
Collection Glenn O'Brien

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Six Crimes, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on masonite
Triptych: 72 x 144 inches
183 x 366 cm
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;
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Mitchell Crew, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick and photocopy collage mounted on wood supports with chain
Triptych: 71 1/2 x 137 3/4 inches
181.5 x 350 cm
Private Collection

Page 86
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
The Philistines, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
72 x 123 inches
183 x 312.5 cm

Page 87
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper mounted on canvas
43 x 31 inches
109 x 78 cm

Page 88
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
30 x 22 inches
76 x 56 cm

Page 89
Top left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm

Top right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Lower left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm
The Schorr Family Collection; on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum

Lower right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 101.6 cm
Collection Jerome Dahan

Page 90
Left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Tuxedo (detail), 1982
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
102 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches
261 x 151.8 cm

Right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Cheese Popcorn), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches
49 x 38.7 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Page 91
Left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Tuxedo (detail), 1982
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
102 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches
260.8 x 151.8 cm

Right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Olive Oil), 1983
Oil paintstick and ballpoint on paper
19 1/4 x 15 3/8 inches
49 x 39 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Page 92
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
88 x 77 inches
223.5 x 195.5 cm
Private Collection

Page 93
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Lead Plate with Hole, 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
86 x 68 inches
218.5 x 172.5 cm
Collection Jerome Dahan

Page 94
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Melting Point of Ice, 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
86 x 68 inches
218.5 x 172.5 cm
The Broad Art Foundation
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio, Los Angeles

Page 95
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Bust), 1984
Acrylic, paper, and tape collage on paper
30 1/8 x 22 5/8 inches
76.2 x 57 cm

Page 96
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (from the series of eleven *Blue Ribbon Paintings*), 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm
The Schorr Family Collection

Page 97
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (from the series of eleven *Blue Ribbon Paintings*), 1984
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm
The Schorr Family Collection

Page 98
Top
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
PPCD, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Lower
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Snakeman, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Page 99
Top
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Liberty, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Lower
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Dog Leg Study, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Page 100
Top
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Wolf Sausage, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Lower
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Olympic, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Page 101
Top
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
50 Cent Piece, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Lower
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Skin Head Wig, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Page 102
Left
LEONARDO DA VINCI
Verso: *The Vertebral Column*, c. 1510
Pen and ink with wash, over black chalk
11 1/4 x 7 7/8 inches
28.6 x 20 cm
Royal Collection Trust /
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017

Right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Academic Study of Male Figure, 1983
Silkscreen on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 13
40 x 31 1/4 inches
101.6 x 79.4 cm

Page 103
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
One part of *Untitled (From Leonardo)*, 1983
Silkscreen in five parts on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 40
Each: 34 3/4 x 30 inches
88.3 x 76.2 cm

Pages 104 and 105
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Two parts of *Untitled (From Leonardo)*, 1983
Silkscreen in five parts on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 40
Each: 34 3/4 x 30 inches
88.3 x 76.2 cm

Page 106
Cover
PETER DALY (editor)
Display Atlas of Elementary Anatomy, 1980
10 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches
25.7 x 21 cm
Year Book Medical Publishers Inc.

Chart
PETER DALY (editor)
Display Atlas of Elementary Anatomy, 1980
10 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches
25.7 x 21 cm
Year Book Medical Publishers Inc.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on backside of page of *Display Atlas of Elementary Anatomy*
10 1/8 x 8 1/4 inches
25.7 x 21 cm
Courtesy Jorg Lederle, Zurich, Switzerland

Page 107
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1986
Acrylic, oil paintstick, ink, graphite, and colored pencil on paper
30 x 22 inches
76.2 x 55.9 cm

Page 108
Left
LEONARDO DA VINCI
Recto: *The Bones of the Foot and the Shoulder*, c. 1510
Pen and ink with wash, over traces of black chalk
11 1/4 x 7 3/4 inches
28.7 x 19.8 cm
Royal Collection Trust /
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017

Right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Leg of a Dog, 1983
Silkscreen on Okawara rice paper
Edition of 11
40 x 31 1/4 inches
101.6 x 79.4 cm
Photograph by Susan Einstein
Courtesy Los Angeles Modern Auctions

Page 109
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick and paper collage on canvas
Polyptych: 84 x 78 inches
213.5 x 198 cm
The Schorr Family Collection; on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum
Photo by Princeton University Art Museum

Pages 110 and 111
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Series of twelve drawings
Untitled, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
Each: 17 x 14 inches
43 x 35.5 cm

Page 112
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Acque Pericolose (Poison Oasis) (detail), 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick and spray paint on canvas
66 x 96 inches
167.5 x 244 cm
The Schorr Family Collection; on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum
Photo by Princeton University Art Museum

Page 114
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (God/Law), 1981
Oil paintstick on paper
10 3/4 x 8 1/2 inches
27.3 x 21.6 cm

Page 115
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
81 x 69 1/4 inches
207 x 176 cm
The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio, Los Angeles

Page 117
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Acque Pericolose (Poison Oasis), 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick and spray paint on canvas
66 x 96 inches
167.5 x 244 cm
The Schorr Family Collection; on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum
Photo by Princeton University Art Museum

Page 118
FLIP SCHULKE
Cassius Clay at the 5th Street gym (with Angelo Dundee), Miami Beach, 1961
© Flip Schulke Archives

Page 118–119
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Per Capita, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
80 x 150 inches
203 x 381 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Pages 120–121
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Notary, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 71 x 158 inches
180.5 x 401.5 cm
The Schorr Family Collection; on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum
Photo by Princeton University Art Museum

Page 123
PABLO PICASSO
Jeune fille devant un miroir (Girl Before a Mirror), 1932
Oil on canvas
64 x 51 1/4 inches
162.3 x 130.2 cm
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA
Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim
© 2017 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/ Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

Pages 124 and 125
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
La Colombia, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas with tied wood supports
Diptych: 72 x 144 inches
183 x 365.5 cm
Private Collection

Page 126
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Left Entrance Hall), 1986
Pencil, oil paintstick, and gouache on paper
42 x 30 inches
106.7 x 76.2 cm

Page 127
Top left
Cave, Tadrat, Algeria, reproduced in *African Rock Art*, by David Coulson and Alec Campbell, 2001, Harry N. Abrams

Top right
Cave, Mashonaland, Zimbabwe, reproduced in *African Rock Art*, by David Coulson and Alec Campbell, 2001, Harry N. Abrams

Bottom right
Illustration from *African Rock Art*, by Burchard Brentjes, 1969
J. M. Dent and Sons Limited

Page 128
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Black Tar and Feathers) (detail), 1982
Acrylic, spray paint, oil paintstick, tar and feather on wood
Polyptych: 108 x 92 inches
275.5 x 233.5 cm

Page 130
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Irony of Negro Policeman, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
72 x 48 inches
183 x 122 cm

Page 131
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Baptism), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas
92 x 92 inches
233.5 x 233.5 cm

Page 132
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Back of the Neck, 1983
Silkscreen and hand coloring on Supra 100 paper
Edition of 24
50 1/4 x 101 inches
128 x 259 cm

Page 133
Left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Artscribe No. 47, July–August 1984
Above: cover and back (folded out)
Below: centerfold

Top right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Acrylic and magic marker pen on Colorcore®
42 x 61 inches
104 x 155 cm

Pages 134–135
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Price of Gasoline in the Third World, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas
Diptych: 60 x 120 inches
152.5 x 305 cm
Private Collection

Page 136
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Profit 1, 1982
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
87 x 157 inches
221 x 399 cm
Private Collection

Page 137
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Boxer), 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on linen
76 x 94 inches
193 x 239 cm
Private Collection
©2008 Christie's Images Limited

Page 138
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
St. Joe Louis Surrounded by Snakes, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas
40 x 40 inches
101.5 x 101.5 cm
Collection Stephanie Seymour Brant

Page 139
GIANFRANCO GORGONI
Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1982
© Gianfranco Gorgoni

Page 140
Top left
Tassili N'Ajjer, Algeria, reproduced in *African Rock Art*, by David Coulson and Alec Campbell, 2001, Harry N. Abrams

Right
DOGON PEOPLES (Mali)
Standing Male Figure
Wood
Height: 82 7/8 inches, 210.5 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection
Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1969

Below
ELEMA PEOPLES (Papua New Guinea)
Eharo mask (detail), 20th century
Barkcloth, plant fiber, wood, human hair, feathers, and paint
wood and patina
Height: 86 inches, 218.4 cm
The Fowler Museum, University of California, Los Angeles
Gift of Wellcome Trust

Page 141
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Self Portrait, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on linen
76 x 94 inches
193 x 239 cm
Private Collection

Page 142
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Eyes and Eggs, 1983
Acrylic and collage on cotton dropcloth
Diptych: 119 x 97 inches
302.5 x 246.5 cm
The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection

Page 144
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Brother's Sausage (detail), 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 187 1/2 inches
122 x 476 cm

Pages 146–147
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (LA Painting), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, spray paint and paper collage on canvas
67 x 206 inches
170 x 523.5 cm
Private Collection

Page 148
FRANCIS BACON
Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, c. 1944
Oil on three boards
Each: 37 x 29 inches
94 x 73.7 cm
The Tate Gallery, Presented by Eric Hall, 1953;
© Tate, London, 2017

Page 149
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Pegasus' First Visit to America in the Shade of the Flatiron Building (Kabal American Zephyr), 1982
Solvent transfer, fabric collage, and acrylic on wood and metal support with flags, cardboard, and electric fan
96 1/2 x 133 1/2 x 22 1/2 inches
245.1 x 339.1 x 57.2 cm
© Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York

Pages 150–151
Top
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Brother's Sausage, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 187 1/2 inches
122 x 476 cm

Bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Fragmen, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 185 1/4 inches
122 x 470.5 cm

Pages 152–153
Top
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Undiscovered Genius of the Mississippi Delta, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 184 inches
122 x 467.5 cm
Nicola Erni Collection
Photograph Courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. © 2017

Bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Life Like Son of Barney Hill, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 205 1/2 inches
122 x 522 cm
Nicola Erni Collection

Pages 154–155
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Toussaint l'Overture Versus Savonarola, 1983
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on canvas
Polyptych: 48 x 230 inches
122 x 584 cm
Nicola Erni Collection

Page 156
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Crown Hotel) (detail), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
48 x 85 inches
122 x 216 cm

Page 158
Left
The Venus of Willendorf,
Upper Paleolithic period
Limestone
Height: 4 3/8 inches, 11 cm
Collection The Natural History Museum, Vienna, Austria

Right
PABLO PICASSO
Femme enceinte (Pregnant Woman), 1948–50
Plaster with metal armature, wood, ceramic vessel, and pottery jars
43 1/4 x 8 5/8 x 12 1/2 inches
110 x 22 x 32 cm
© 2017 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

Page 159
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Amor con Pollo, 1981
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
68 x 84 inches
172.5 x 213.5 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Page 161
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Self Portrait with Suzanne, 1982
Oil paintstick on paper
60 x 40 inches
152.4 x 102 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Page 162
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Robot Man and Woman, 1982
Oil paintstick and felt pen on paper
22 x 30 inches
56 x 76 cm

Page 163
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Mater, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
72 x 84 inches
183 x 213.5 cm

Page 164
PABLO PICASSO
Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907
Oil on canvas
96 x 84 inches
244 x 233.7 cm
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.
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Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

Page 165
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 96 x 72 inches
244 x 183 cm

Page 166
WILLEM DE KOONING
Woman I, 1950–52
Oil on canvas
75 7/8 x 58 inches
192.7 x 147.3 cm
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA
© 2017 The Willem de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

Page 167
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Crown Hotel), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
48 x 85 inches
122 x 216 cm

Page 168
EDOUARD MANET
Olympia, 1863
Oil on canvas
51 1/4 x 74 3/4 inches
130.5 x 191 cm
© RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski / Art Resource, NY

Page 169
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Maid from Olympia), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
48 1/4 x 30 inches
122.5 x 76 cm

Page 170
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Tuxedo, 1983
Silkscreen on canvas
Edition of 10
102 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches
261 x 151.8 cm

Page 172
TAMRA DAVIS
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Fred Hoffman, Venice, CA, 1983; Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child, 2010 (screen grab)
©Tamra Davis

Page 173
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Top left
Untitled (Mostly Old Ladies), 1983
Oil paintstick and ink on paper
19 5/8 x 15 1/4 inches
49.8 x 38.7 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Top middle
Untitled (Jackson), 1983
Oil paintstick and ink on paper
19 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches
49 x 38.7 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Top right
Untitled (Plaid), 1983
Oil paintstick and ink on paper
19 5/8 x 15 1/2 inches
49.8 x 39.4 cm
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York;
Purchased with funds from Mrs. William A. Marsteller,
The Norman and Rosita Winston Foundation, Inc., and the Drawing Committee
91.15

Lower left
Untitled (Olive Oil), 1983
Oil paintstick and ink on paper
19 1/4 x 15 3/8 inches
49 x 39 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Lower middle
Untitled (Quality), 1983
Oil paintstick and ink on paper
19 1/4 x 15 1/2 inches
49 x 39.4 cm
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
Purchased with funds
from Mrs. William A. Marsteller,
The Norman and Rosita Winston Foundation, Inc., and the Drawing Committee
91.16

Lower right
Untitled (Cheese Popcorn), 1983
19 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches
49 x 38.7 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich CT

Page 174
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Crown), 1983
Acrylic, ink, and paper collage on paper
20 x 29 inches
51 x 74 cm

Page 175
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Beat Bop, 1983
Album cover and back cover
Tartown Records
12 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches
32 x 32 cm

Page 176
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Charlie Parker) (detail), 1983
Oil paintstick and ink on paper
30 x 22 1/4 inches
76 x 56.5 cm
The Schorr Family Collection

Page 178
Left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick and photocopy collage on canvas
60 x 48 inches
152.5 x 122 cm

Right
CHARLIE PARKER
Koko Sessions, 1945
Album cover
New Sounds in Modern Music
12 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches
32 x 32 cm

Page 179
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Plastic Sax, 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick and photocopy collage on canvas
60 x 48 inches
152.5 x 122 cm
Collection Agnès b., Paris

Page 180
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Max Roach, 1984
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
60 x 60 inches
152.5 x 152.5 cm
Private Collection

Page 181
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Trumpet, 1984
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
60 x 60 inches
152.5 x 152.5 cm
Private Collection

Page 182
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
CPRKR, 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
60 x 40 inches
152.5 x 101.5 cm
Collection of Donald Baechler

Page 183
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Undiscovered Genius, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, charcoal, graphite and colored pencil
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Page 184
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Charles the First, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 78 x 62 inches
198 x 158 cm
Private Collection

Page 185
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Horn Players, 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on wood supports
Triptych: 96 x 75 inches
244 x 190.5 cm
The Broad Art Foundation
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio, Los Angeles

Page 186
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Charlie Parker's All Stars), 1983
Crayon on paper
24 x 11 1/8 inches
61 x 28 cm

Page 187
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
King Zulu, 1986
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
79 1/2 x 100 inches
202 x 254 cm

Page 188
Top
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Discography (One), 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm
Private Collection,
Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Switzerland

Bottom
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Discography (Two), 1983
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
66 x 60 inches
167.5 x 152.5 cm
Private Collection,
Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Switzerland

Page 189
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Now's the Time, 1985
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood
Diameter: 92 1/2 inches, 235 cm
Courtesy The Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT

Page 190
JASPER JOHNS
White Flag, 1955
Encaustic, oil, newsprint and charcoal on canvas
78 x 120 3/4 inches
199 x 306.7 cm
Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA
Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace, Reba and Dave Williams, Stephen and Nan Swid, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger, Louis and Bessie Adler Foundation Inc., Paula Cussi, Maria-Gaetana Matisse, The Barnett Newman Foundation, Jane and Robert Carroll, Eliot and Wilson Nolen, Mr. and Mrs. Derald H. Ruttenberg, Ruth and Seymour Klein Foundation Inc., Andrew N. Schiff, The Cowles Charitable Trust, The Merrill G. and Emita E. Hastings Foundation, John J. Roche, Molly and Walter Bareiss, Linda and Morton Janklow, Aaron I. Fleischman, and Linford L. Lougheed Gifts, and gifts from friends of the Museum; Kathryn E. Hurd, Denise and Andrew Saul, George A Hearn, Arthur Hoppock Hearn, Joseph H. Hazen Foundation Purchase, and Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon B. Polsky Funds; Mayer Fund; Florene M. Schoenborn Bequest; Gifts of Professor and Mrs. Zevi Scharfstein and Himan Brown, and other gifts, bequests, and funds from various donors, by exchange, 1998
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Page 191
Installation "Basquiat"
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, July–October 2005
© Brian Forrest

Page 192
TSENG KWONG CHI
Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, New York, 1985
Photo by Tseng Kwong Chi
© Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.

Page 193
GEOFF DUNLOP
Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Tony Shafrazi, New York, 1986;
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol, State of the Art, Episode 6, 1986 (screen grab)
© Illuminations Media

Page 194
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Dos Cabezas, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
60 x 60 inches
152.5 x 152.5 cm
Private Collection

Page 195
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Olympic Rings), 1985
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
81 1/8 x 183 1/2 inches
206 x 466 cm
© 2017 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Page 196
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Paramount), 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick and silkscreen on canvas
76 3/8 x 115 inches
194 x 292 cm
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Image Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Switzerland

Page 197
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (6.99), 1985
Acrylic, oil paintstick and silkscreen on canvas
113 x 165 3/8 inches
297 x 420 cm
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Pages 198–199
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Zenith), 1985
Acrylic, oil paintstick and silkscreen on canvas
116 7/8 x 264 7/8 inches
297 x 673 cm
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Page 200
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1984–85
Acrylic, oil paintstick and silkscreen on canvas
86 x 67 3/4 inches
218 x 173 cm
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Page 201
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick and silkscreen on canvas
76 1/3 x 105 inches
194 x 266.7 cm
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Page 202
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Perishable), 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick and silkscreen on canvas
91 x 76 1/2 inches
231 x 194 cm
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Page 203
ANDY WARHOL AND JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Zenith 1/2), 1984
Acrylic, oil paintstick and silkscreen on canvas
115 3/4 x 165 inches
294 x 419 cm
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Private Collection

Page 204
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Estrella) (detail), 1985
Oil paintstick, graphite and colored pencil on paper
29 1/2 x 41 5/8 inches
75 x 105.7 cm
The Schorr Family Collection

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Left
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Acque Pericolose (Poison Oasis) (detail), 1981
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and spray paint on canvas
66 x 96 inches
167.5 x 244 cm
The Schorr Family Collection

Right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
CPRKR (detail), 1982
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports
60 x 40 inches
152.5 x 101.5 cm
Collection of Donald Baechler

Page 207
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Estrella), 1985
Oil paintstick, graphite, and colored pencil on paper
29 1/2 x 41 5/8 inches
75 x 105.7 cm
The Schorr Family Collection

Page 208
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
See Plate 3, 1982
Acrylic and oil paintstick on wood and canvas mounted on wood
24 x 17 1/4 x 18 inches
61 x 43.8 x 45.7 cm
Collection Emmanuelle and Jérôme de Noirmont

Pages 208–209
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict, 1982
Acrylic, oil, and oil paintstick on wood and metal
Triptych: 80 x 82 inches
203.2 x 208.3 cm
Collection Emmanuelle and Jérôme de Noirmont

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Top
Installation "Basquiat"
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, July–October 2005
© Brian Forrest

Bottom
MATTHIAS GRUNEWALD
The Isenheim Altarpiece, 1512–16
Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian; the Crucifixion; Saint Anthony the Great; Predella, the Deposition of Christ
(Overall view, wings closed)
Oil and tempera on wood
105 7/8 x 120 7/8 inches
269 x 307 cm
Collection Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France
© Musée d'Unterlinden, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

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Top
GEORGE HIROSE
Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring at Julian Schnabel Opening Reception, Whitney Museum of American Art, November 5, 1987
© George Hirose

Bottom
KEITH HARING
Broadway/66th St. (Subway drawing), 1982
Chalk on paper mounted on canvas
38 1/2 x 39 1/2 inches
98 x 100 cm
©The Keith Haring Foundation, 2017

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CBS
Keith Haring in a New York City Subway station
Film extract from the "CBS Evening News," October 20, 1982

Page 214
TSENG KWONG CHI
Keith Haring and Tseng Kwong Chi's Living Room, New York, 1987
Photo by Tseng Kwong Chi
© Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.

Page 215
TSENG KWONG CHI
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Great Jones Street Studio, New York, 1987
Photo by Tseng Kwong Chi
© Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.

Pages 216–217
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Gravestone, 1987
Acrylic and oil on wood
Triptych: 55 x 69 x 22 inches
139.5 x 175 x 56 cm
Installation "Man Made, Jean-Michel Basquiat" Sotheby's S2, New York, May–June 2013
Photograph Courtesy Sotheby's, Inc. © 2017

Page 218
TSENG KWONG CHI
Jean-Michel Basquiat, Great Jones Street Studio, New York, 1987
Photo by Tseng Kwong Chi
© Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.

Page 221
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled (Savoy), 1986
Acrylic and oil paintstick on paper mounted on canvas
94 x 136 1/2 inches
239 x 346.5 cm
Collection of Larry Warsh

Pages 222–223
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Victor 25448, 1987
Acrylic, oil paintstick, wax, and crayon on paper mounted on canvas
73 x 133 inches
185.5 x 338 cm

Page 224
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Untitled, 1987
Acrylic, oil paintstick, graphite, colored crayon, and photocopy collage on paper mounted on canvas
90 x 107 inches
228.5 x 272 cm
© 2010 Christie's Images Limited

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Eroica, 1987
Acrylic, oil paintstick, and photocopy collage on paper mounted on canvas
90 x 107 inches
228.5 x 272 cm
Private Collection

Page 226
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Pegasus (details), 1987
Acrylic, graphite, and colored pencil on paper mounted on canvas
88 x 90 inches
223.5 x 228.5 cm
Kravis Collection
Image courtesy Acquavella Galleries

Page 226–227
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Pegasus, 1987
Acrylic, graphite, and colored pencil on paper mounted on canvas
88 x 90 inches
223.5 x 228.5 cm
Kravis Collection
Image courtesy Acquavella Galleries

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HENRY DREYFUSS
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Page 229
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
From *The Daros Suite*
Ascent, 1982–83
Acrylic, oil paintstick, pastel, color crayon, charcoal and pencil on paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
57 x 76.5 cm
Daros Collection, Switzerland

Page 230
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Heaven, 1985
Oil, acrylic, oil paintstick, and paper collage on wood panel mounted on wood
80 x 33 x 3 inches
203 x 84 x 7.5 cm

Page 232
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Riddle Me This Batman, 1987
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
117 x 114 1/4 inches
297 x 290 cm

Page 233
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
The Dingoes That Park Their Brains with Their Gum, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick on linen
100 x 114 inches
254 x 289.5 cm

Page 234
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Eroica II, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick on paper mounted on canvas
90 1/2 x 88 3/4 inches
230 x 225.5 cm
Nicola Erni Collection

Page 235
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Eroica I, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick on paper mounted on canvas
90 1/2 x 88 3/4 inches
230 x 225.5 cm
Nicola Erni Collection

Page 236
Installation "Basquiat"
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, July–October 2005
© Brian Forrest

Page 238
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Riding with Death, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
98 x 114 inches
249 x 289.5 cm
Private Collection

Page 239
Left
Illustration (extract) from *Royal Portrait from the 'Dende-Maro' at Rusape, Rhodesia* in *African Rock Art*, by Burchard Brentjes, 1969, J. M. Dent and Sons Limited

Right
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Pharynx, 1985
Acrylic, oil paintstick and photocopy collage on canvas
86 x 68 inches
218.5 x 172.5 cm

Page 241
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Dry Cell, 1988
Acrylic and oil paintstick on canvas
102 x 114 inches
284.5 x 289.5 cm
Private collection

Page 242
SYLVIA PLACHY
Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1986
© Sylvia Plachy

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In 2004, Paul Schimmel asked me to join the curatorial team then preparing a Basquiat retrospective for the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Houston Museum of Fine Art. Not only did this opportunity enable me to resume my profession as an art historian and museum curator, but it also became the "wake-up call" telling me that I needed to unravel the meaning of Basquiat's art. Richard Serra's acknowledgment of the relevance of my text for the Brooklyn retrospective encouraged me to attempt a much more in-depth study.

As part of the 2005 MOCA retrospective, I asked Tamra Davis to consider removing from the vault and screening film footage of Jean-Michel Basquiat, which she shot in 1983. This screening was followed Tamra's highly acclaimed documentary "Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child." I am most appreciative that Tamra allowed me to include images of Jean-Michel and me from that footage in my book.

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